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TRISTRAM LACY

OR

THE INDIVIDUALIST

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OR

THE INDIVIDUALIST

BY

W. H. MALLOCK

AUTHOR OF "ARISTOCRACY AND EVOLUTION," "LABOUR AND THE POPULAR WELFARE," "IS LIFE WORTH LIVING?" ETC.

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TRISTRAM LACY,

OR

THE INDIVIDUALIST

CHAPTER I

It was by far the most malignant, though not the severest, winter — so said aggrieved Londoners — that had ever called for their execrations. It brought none of the clearness of frost with it, nor the exhilarating brilliance of snow; but merely a bitter succession of yellow or slate-coloured days, which turned luncheon into a twilight meal, and made sunshine incredible; whilst the penetrating dampness, though only just cold enough to congeal the puddles, and put a treacherous glaze on the pavement, stole through men's clothing, and clinging to them like the shirt of Nessus, chilled them as though its temperature were some degrees less than zero.

Nevertheless, in spite of the weather, the streets of the West End showed an animation beyond what is common in January. This was due to the fact that Parliament was to meet early, for urgent reasons, which are now matter of history. But in fashionable and valetudinarian circles, unconnected with politics, there was beginning an exodus to the South which had not been equalled for years; and as soon as the present political crisis should be over, the movement threatened to extend itself to political circles also. At all events it was known that Lord Runcorn, the Tory Prime Minister, had been ordered by his doctors to betake himself to a warmer climate, the very first day that his duties should allow of his departure, and that a villa had already been secured for him, which was somewhere between Hyères and Cannes, but was far removed from any of the great international watering-places. At present, however, he still remained in London, and London still was a scene,

despite the migration southwards, not only of political, but of social activity also.

That such was the case might have been very easily discerned by any one who had been present one morning, in a boudoir near Berkeley Square, whose windows, though it was now midday, were sheets of yellowish gloom. It was a room which showed by its own internal evidence that the house it belonged to was one of considerable importance, and was moreover the home of some established and wealthy family. This fact was whispered by the massive mahogany doors, and the high and discoloured cornice, which seemed to tell the observer that it was far too dignified to require so vulgar a process as cleaning; whilst the heavy pictures, whose frames glittered against the faded walls, together with some old French commodes and fine ormulu candelabra, seemed to be there as institutions rather than works of art. The room indeed might have been taken for a man's almost as easily as for a woman's, if it had not been for an extraordinary profusion of photographs, catching the eye everywhere on screens or on velvet stands — photographs of ladies with long trains and tiaras, of guardsmen, politicians, of members of the Yacht Squadron, and also of a variety of unmistakably Royal personages, the genuineness of these last being attested by the signature of the august originals.

But though the room was less elaborately feminine than the ordinary fashionable boudoir, certainly nothing similar could be said with regard to its present mistress. She was a woman remarkable for a classical and commanding beauty; but this was softened by a certain *espiéglerie*, and a something else in her eyes, as well as by every art known either to maid or *modiste*. To-day she was clad in some loose garment of silk, which a man — perhaps inaccurately — would have ventured to describe as a tea-gown. The sleeves, at all events, fell negligently back, so as to show in strong relief the perfection and whiteness of her wrists; whilst her whole costume, as she sat at a large writing-table, was finished by her embroidered insteps and the sharp points of her shoes.

She was not alone. On the opposite side of the table was

another woman, whose bonnet proclaimed her a visitor, and whose cheeks were still flushed by the touch of the air outside. She, too, was in her own way handsome, and a business-like alertness trembled on her lips and in her eyes.

"My dear," said her hostess, "I think it is more than good of you to come out on a raw morning like this. But if anything is to be done, of course it must be done at once. He's the only man who could make this seat in Manchester safe for us; and the election can't possibly be much later than Easter. Well — I've been going over all the items to see what money will be required. It's all there, down on that sheet of paper. It's not a case of paying his election expenses merely. The man is virtually a bankrupt, and what we shall have to do will be to provide him with an income — I should say for at least three years. This must be twice as much as he has ever had in his life, and very nearly a quarter of what he has been accustomed to spend."

The visitor took the paper and glanced down a line of figures. "It comes," she said, "to a good bit, doesn't it? However, I've been into the question of ways and means; and as for the money, we can get it from several sources. The only difficulty will be how to get him to take it. It must seem to come from the party, or from some influential section of it. He has far too much touchiness — I don't say too many principles — to consent to save his country as the pensioner of his private friends."

"I think," said the other, "that between us we ought to manage it. I've got him to dine to-night to meet the Prime Minister quietly; and my new *chef* — he is really quite first-rate — will put him in a good temper, if anything human can."

It has often been said that the modern growth of Democracy has been fatal to the influence of the great lady in politics. The observation, however, probably owes more of its plausibility to an overestimate of what the great lady did in the past than it does to the insignificance of what she still can do in the present. Only let a woman unite in her own person wealth and brilliant rank with ambition, talent, and beauty, and her political influence to-day may be as great, though not quite the

same, as it could have been had she lived in the days of her great-grandmother. Nothing could prove that such is the case more reassuringly than history teaching by example in the person of Lady Tregothran as she sat that morning in conclave with her celebrated friend, Mrs. Tilney, discussing the means by which a popular but spendthrift Tory, whose power in the country had been of an extraordinary kind, might be brought back again to that Parliamentary life from which his own uncertain temper and reckless habits had banished him.

The discussion was long; and any listener who had remembered that the feminine attention is remarkable for its versatility rather than for its concentration, would have been forced to admit that they kept to their point wonderfully; for not only did they never lose sight of it till they had fully and finally settled everything that by any possibility could have been settled at that moment, but they actually continued their discussion for a good twenty mintues afterwards; and even then what put an end to it was not that it was logically concluded, but that an observation of Lady Tregothran's by accident introduced a subject which, though connected with a politician, was not in itself political, but was of a kind far more exciting to the normal daughters of Eve.

"I wish," said Lady Tregothran, with a regretful sigh, "that Octavius — our dear, immoral, accommodating old Octavius — had only been spared us by the Fates for five or six months longer. He would have managed the whole business at once. There never was a man who greased the wheels of a party as he did."

The personage alluded to with so much sincere feeling was a lately deceased partner in a great provincial bank — a man of immense wealth and of very eccentric character. For the last twenty-five years, his wife having died early, he had shrunk from most society except that of her irregular successors. He had been, however, little as the ordinary public was aware of it, constantly connected with the chiefs of the Tory party, to whom, with a liberality which seemed to be inexhaustible, he had supplied money for a variety of political purposes, and

several of whose statesmen he had financed when they happened to be in private difficulties.

"Yes, indeed," said Mrs. Tilney, "we all of us miss *him* — not that I personally ever knew him myself. You, my dear Nita, I believe, were the only woman — I mean the only woman in Society — who was admitted to the privilege of his friendship; and you could always get anything out of him you wanted. It was lucky for some Tories that he was so sensitive to the claims of beauty."

Lady Tregothran laughed. "No," she said, "no; you flatter me. His friendship for me was hopelessly — indeed, I may say insultingly — Platonic. The truth was merely this, and it is really rather amusing. I always took his view of the antiquity of his family seriously. Of course the foundation of that enormous fortune of his was laid by his great-grandfather, I think a solicitor at Hull; but his grandfather and father both of them made good marriages, and he had amongst his cousins and connections half-a-dozen earls and countesses. This, however, did not content him. What he wanted to prove was that his family was of ancient origin — that it was one which is mentioned in the Herald's *Visitations of Yorkshire*, and that his great-grandfather had not been the founder, but only the restorer, of its greatness. I used to listen with all my ears to everything he had to say to me. I pored with him over endless papers and passages in county histories; I showed myself convinced that he and I had three ancestors in common, and he liked me better for this relationship, which was quite imaginary, than he ever liked his eldest son for one that was presumably real. This, as Othello says, is the only magic I used; and though it got me whatever I asked him for during his life, it was hardly so successful in determining what he should leave me on his death."

"What did he leave you?" said Mrs. Tilney, with inquiring eyes.

"I'll tell you," said Lady Tregothran. "His old genealogical papers, and the red morocco boxes which he had had made to contain them; nothing else, not even a five-pound note. He left ten thousand pounds to Phyllis Farrell alone — exactly

a thousand pounds for each month that she lived with him — or probably five thousand for each week she was faithful; so virtue, you see, must content itself with being its own reward."

"Tell me," said Mrs. Tilney, "when you used to stay with him, what sort of people did you meet? Was there any woman to do the honours? I don't suppose you had Phyllis Farrell scintillating at the head of the table."

"When I used to go there," Lady Tregothran answered, "the only woman was a niece — a niece in the Papal sense — who looked the embodiment of every respectable principle to the violation of which she owed her own existence. But, my dear, it amuses me to see you so very curious."

"I am curious, I admit it," said Mrs. Tilney, laughing. "But I don't see why that should strike you as being so particularly amusing."

Lady Tregothran looked at her friend with a mischievous sparkle in her eyes. "You are only," she said, "one more example of what I observe so often, that good women — for you, my dear, are immaculate — are so interested in bad men. I am not. I have found them much too common. All the same, I was really fond of Octavius, though his family arrangements were so very openly patriarchal, and though he owed to his many Hagars so many more descendants than to his Sarah. I should call him a model to all illegitimate fathers. You know, I suppose, the way in which he left his money."

"Yes," said Mrs. Tilney, "I think so. Everything went, didn't it, to Mr. Lacy, his wife's nephew?"

"My dear," said Lady Tregothran, "not a bit of it. He not only had by his wife one child, a son, but he had a baker's dozen more by a mixed assortment of mothers; and to each of these last — mothers as well as children — who were alive when the will was made, he left a fortune of sixty thousand pounds. The remainder would naturally have gone to the legitimate son and heir, if the young man had not been an inveterate gambler, and shown a disposition to marry a burlesque actress. As it was, he quarrelled with his father, and went off in disgrace to America with one of his half-brothers, who was, if possible, more reckless than himself. Well, Octavius, angry

and bitterly disappointed in his son — I know all this because he himself told me — could not find it in his heart to cast off the hope of his family — hopeless as he thought him to be — with the proverbial shilling; and so what he did was this. His only other blood relation was an elderly widowed sister, who had no children of her own. Well — I can't give you the proper legal phrases, but the kind of arrangement he made in his will was this. Without naming the good lady by name, he arranged that the bulk of his property should go to his next-of-kin, other than his scapegrace son, meaning of course this widow, who might, he thought, live for ten years, and who would, he felt justified in assuming, die without heirs of her body; and then, should the son be still alive, the property was to pass to him. If, however, the son should have predeceased the aunt, or if both son and aunt should have predeceased the testator — I hope you admire my language, though I'm not sure if it's accurate — the property was to be divided between the widow woman's step-son, a Mr. Millikin — he was to have about five thousand a year — and Mr. Lacy, Octavius's wife's nephew, who was to come in for all the remainder. So your friend, you see, inherits a part of the fortune only — I tell you this, my dear, in case you should be thinking of him for Norah — and he only inherits that, because a judicious Providence, paying one of its rare visits to Chicago, saw fit to remove his prodigal cousin by a fever, whilst the widow succumbed soon afterwards to the healing waters of Harrogate. I don't know what Mr. Lacy's income may be. But, cheer up, Carlotta. It is certainly something large."

Mrs. Tilney was one of those people who disliked to be bantered herself, almost as much as she liked to banter others. Moreover, as she saw in herself, although she lived in the world, a peculiar horror of the worldliness that was rampant all around her, she was quite unprepared for this flippant imputation to herself of a weakness so characteristic of her morally inferior friends.

"I assure you," she said, with a moment's viciousness in her voice, "that if Mr. Lacy had twice as much as you say he has, he's one of the last men I should wish to call my son-in-law.

Nobody knows exactly what his story has been, but there's been some entanglement — every one says that; and he's still at the tender mercy of any pretty face to-day. He's delightful in every capacity except that of a husband."

"I," replied Lady Tregothran, "should set his past to his credit. No man is so likely to be attached to his own wife, as a man who has been previously attached to the wife of another man; for no one knows so well the misery of all such entanglements. A married woman has, for her unfortunate lover, all the disadvantages of a wife, without any of the advantages. She makes all the demands on his constancy that a wife could ever make; and, unlike a wife, she can't even leave his cards for him. However," she added, with a sharply repressed sigh, "that's a well-worn subject. There's not much left to be said about it."

"The reason," said Mrs. Tilney, who still stuck to her point, "the reason, my dear, if you very much wish to know, why Mr. Lacy has happened to interest me at this moment, is that I had thought, if our present plan should fail, he'd be the best man available for contesting this seat in Manchester, and I wrote to Lord Runcorn, his uncle, only three days ago, asking him to tell me his own views of the matter. Mr. Lacy is, or might be, the rising man of the day. If he fails to be so he will only have himself to thank."

"Well," replied Lady Tregothran, "though I do but just know him personally, I know that he ought to be the rising man, as you say. He's a soldier, a scholar, a politician — he seems to have all the accomplishments; and with his fine eyes, and that hair of his a little grizzled on the temples, he's just the man for women to find interesting. Few men so early have succeeded in so many things. He's had everything in his favour thus far, with the exception of one thing — money, and now he's got that also."

"I'm afraid," said Mrs. Tilney, "that he has had all along another thing against him besides a want of money, and that he has it against him still. This other thing is himself."

"My dear," said Lady Tregothran, "you are talking in

riddles. What is it the man has done? You talk of his story. Has he any other story beyond some adventure with the inevitable married woman? Has he ever forged? Has he ever cheated at cards?"

"No," replied Mrs. Tilney, "I believe him to be the soul of honour. He is himself an obstacle to his own success simply on account of what he is, not on account of what he has done. He is an obstacle to his own success because he does not care to succeed."

"I was afraid," said Lady Tregothran, "when you spoke of him as the soul of honour, you were going to tell me that he had privately married his cook. Ten to one he's suffering from love or liver. We needn't despair of his getting the better of both."

"On the contrary," said Mrs. Tilney, "I believe his health to be excellent. His tongue in the morning is probably as pink as yours, and as for his apathy — for apathetic he is — his symptoms are as different as possible from those of the despairing lover."

"Mr. Lacy, then," said Lady Tregothran, "must be a very mysterious person. But, my dear, may I ask, by the way, how you, who knew so little about his money matters, happen to be so intimately acquainted with his heart, his soul, and his constitution?"

"Well," replied Mrs. Tilney, with triumph impending in her eyes, "would you really like me to tell you? I said just now that I had written about Mr. Lacy to Lord Runcorn, — his uncle, who knows him intimately, — asking him if he thought his nephew might possibly serve our purpose at Manchester. Only an hour before I came here I received Lord Runcorn's answer. You can read it if you like — it really is worth looking at — and then you will see the source from which I derive my knowledge."

Mrs. Tilney produced from a bag an envelope of imposing aspect and handed it to Lady Tregothran, who proceeded to extract its contents. Mrs. Tilney, with some amusement, saw her soon become absorbed in them. Lord Runcorn's letter was as follows: —

"My dear Mrs. Tilney, — Attached as I am to my nephew, Tristram Lacy, it gives me pleasure to see that so shrewd a judge of character as yourself should have pitched on him as a hopeful candidate for so important and difficult a constituency; but I must tell you candidly, since you ask me, that I believe it would be useless to apply to him. I say this for two reasons, and it may interest you to know what they are.

"In the first place, so high is the opinion entertained of my nephew's abilities, not by myself only, but by my colleagues, that he is about to be offered a certain post in Egypt — a post which I will leave it to your own sagacity to identify. And if he wishes to reënter public life at all he will certainly prefer a brilliant certainty such as this to the doubtful chance of a seat in the House of Commons — an honour which he has enjoyed already, and which he has already relinquished.

"But my second reason for thinking that such an application would be useless is stronger still. I do not think he will consent to reënter public life at all; for, so far as I understand him — and of late I have observed him closely — he has lost all the personal ambition to which public life appeals. Should this prove to be the case, I shall certainly be disappointed in him as a man; but he will be all the more interesting to me, who am a philosopher besides being a politician, as a subject of psychological study.

"Your letter, my dear friend, reached me this evening; I am answering it in the dead of night. I am wakeful, and my thoughts are beginning to run away with me. Let me write you a little more about a character which, though in some ways exceptional, is, in other ways, representative.

"You and I are well enough acquainted — better perhaps through literature than through life — with the victims of the malady which was once called melancholia, and is now, I believe, called pessimism. Cynicism is one variety of it. Cynicism is pessimism in its most superficial form. The fundamental peculiarity of all these victims is, not an inability to enjoy the smaller things of life, but an inability to believe that there is any true greatness in its great things. Well, with men of this kind, as doctors are now very rightly teaching us,

pessimism is generally the expression, not of any reasoned theory, but of a diseased temperament, an effeminate nervous system, a feeble will, or the incapacities of a maimed body, the reasoned theory being merely the excuse for it, not its cause. Now Tristram Lacy, my nephew, has come, I think, to regard life with an apathy — an acquiescent indifference — which resembles that of these helpless decadents and degenerates. But the interesting thing with regard to him is this. In his case this apathy has a totally different origin. He is perfectly healthy, he is good looking, he is physically brave, his will is strong, his temperament is energetic, his spirits are naturally good, he has a keen sense of the ridiculous, and though he is not perhaps free from some little weaknesses of the flesh, he is not suffering from any wound of the heart. His pessimism, his apathy, his unnerving indifference, is a disease which has nothing to do with his temperament or his physical constitution. It has its origin altogether in the intellect. I mean it is a disease produced by a sane and unimpaired logic working on such premises as are supplied to it by contemporary philosophy. Profoundly religious as he used to be when a boy — profoundly impressed as I remember his being by the sublime mysteries of the Christian worship — he has gradually come to be a disbeliever in everything that disassociates the human destiny from the destiny of the dust; and having once assented to this universal negation, his mind has done what so many minds are too weak to do — he has pushed this negation to its full logical consequences. And he has thus become, as I said just now, representative; for he represents the effects which the rationalism of the modern world has on men in proportion as they really believe what it teaches them.

"Tristram Lacy was born, although you may hardly believe it, with the temperament of a poet, as well as with the vigour of a man of action. He is a poet now in whom the ideal is absolutely dead. He is a man of action who would be capable of doing great things if his intellect did not convince him that there is nothing great to do. It is possible that he still retains some romantic feeling for his home in Cheshire — a

fine old gentleman-like place, though very much dilapidated — which, if it had not been for this fortune which has so opportunely come to him, would have probably been already in the hands of the mortgagees. Ever since he succeeded to his inheritance he has shut himself up there like a hermit. But his home, if he still believes in it, is, I fear, the last of his ideals. We shall see, however, if this is so. The offer of Egypt will put our philosopher to the test.

"My dear friend, if this tragic paralysis of the imagination and the moral energies is the logical result of the philosophy which is now extending itself throughout the world, I may well be comforted by the thought that my own eyes, at all events, will not look on the evil that is to come. In this, I think, I possess the one advantage which you, whom the Fates have forbidden ever to grow old, need envy me. — I am, as you know me to be, your faithful friend, RUNCORN."

When Lady Tregothran finished the letter she looked up at her visitor, as if in search of some apology for the interest which she felt she had betrayed in it. But not finding one, she took up a large card which was standing in a rack beside her, and with a laugh pushed it over to Mrs. Tilney.

"Look," she said, "Juliet Scarva is going to have a party to-night. If her party is as large as her card I pity those who are going to it. I am not. Did I tell you that I leave London to-morrow? I shall be at our house at Ascot till next month, when we go abroad."

At this moment the door of the room was opened; the words, "Lady Flotsam," were articulated by a servant's voice; and there in the doorway appeared a radiant vision, arrayed from head to foot in the scarlet of the brightest poppies.

"Oh, Nita," it cried, advancing, "you nice, dear, darling thing, how delicious it is to find you in, and have just one sweet, snug crack with you. It's ages — let me kiss you on both cheeks — since I saw you." Lady Flotsam, when her long embrace was concluded, grew aware of the presence of Mrs. Tilney, and slightly modified the extreme effusiveness of her manner; Mrs. Tilney and she being little more than

acquaintances — and acquaintances conscious that neither was inclined to adore the other.

"I congratulate you on your dress," said Lady Tregothran. "Turn round to the light, and show me how it looks behind. That's the most gorgeous thing I shall see till I see the sun rise in Egypt."

"Yes," said Lady Flotsam, "it's a nice little bit of colour. It's something to cheer up London with on this horrible winter's day."

Meanwhile Mrs. Tilney had risen. "Nita," she said, "I must be off. And so you're leaving London to-morrow, are you? Write and tell me what happens to-night; and if you want to meet Mr. Lacy, the hero of that interesting letter, only let me know, and I'll ask you both to dinner. Good-by, my dear," she said, with an amused glance at Lady Flotsam, who was by this time furtively consulting a mirror, to see if her cheeks had been properly matched with her dress. "Good-by, my dear, I wouldn't interrupt you two for worlds."

CHAPTER II

The raw gloom that evening tasted and smelt of fog, as it filled with its hazy presence one of the thoroughfares of northern London; and the lines of lamps made it only half-transparent, except where here and there a blinding electric star sent out its daggers naked in all directions. Enormous drays went by, and the varnished bulk of omnibuses, splashing through muddy puddles of yellow and white lamplight, whilst the lumbering roar of traffic was now and again pierced by the shrill note of a railway whistle, followed by faint echoes. Through the baffling atmosphere the huge and fantastic hotel which fronts the St. Pancras Station showed clearly enough a vision of its Gothic entrances, and the glow of its lower windows; but its towers and roofs and pinnacles, and the whole of the upper portion of it, were nothing but phantoms in the smothering density overhead. Amongst these uncertain shapes one thing alone seemed real — the illuminated clock, which hung there like a muffled moon, informing the world below that the hour was half-past six.

It had only just ceased drizzling, as was made evident by the fact that reflections fought with shadows on the wet and glimmering pavements; and many of the foot-passengers, as they hurried or loitered by, still held over their heads umbrellas like black mushrooms. The scene was pervaded by a squalid and yet almost romantic mystery, to which the procession of dim figures contributed. Who were these vague multitudes? To what ranks did they belong? It was hardly possible to form any conjecture. All had an air of being somehow invisible, or cloaked, past recognition, in folds of the same obscurity. It was only when groups at a crossing, under one of the electric lights, waited till the policeman's miracle should

permit them to pass over, that any distinct details of dress or face revealed themselves. Then for a moment some mechanic carrying a bundle, some tightly jacketed music-mistress, with her music-case of American cloth, some bushy-bearded prosperous man in a thick double-breasted overcoat, or some boarding-house Casanova, his eyes gleaming like unclean lanterns, would appear with the crude distinctness of an under-exposed photograph, before the gloom once more endued them with its dissolving garments.

Such a group had formed itself at a crossing near the station gates, when a man joined it who, had anybody cared to notice him, would have been recognised as oddly different from any of his present companions. The poise of his head was different, and the glossiness of his silk hat, and something in the smoothness with which his coat adapted itself to his well-shaped shoulders; whilst an eye that had scrutinised the lower part of his person would have seen in his gloved hand the glimmer of a gold-tipped cane. As the traffic continued to flow without being arrested for their convenience, some members of the group began to express impatience, especially a middle-aged woman with a little girl, who was clinging to her, and who at last plunged into the roadway, calling to her to come along. The man with the glossy hat, who had hitherto stood quite motionless, caught sight of the child just in time to seize her, and drag her from under the heads of the horses of a gigantic van. "My dear good woman," he said, with a not unkindly sharpness, "for heaven's sake keep an eye on your property. This little wretch was as near as possible done for."

"Ah! God bless 'ee," said the woman, "but that was good of 'ee," clutching at the child with a species of castigating affection. "Here, Ella, come here. You did give me a turn, you did."

The little girl looked up and began to cry. The man's eyes fell on the woe-begone bewilderment of her face. "See," he said, putting a penny into her hand, "that is to buy sweetmeats with when you get to the other side; and this is a sixpence I'm going to give to your mother, which she will keep

for you, to buy the black dose afterwards." There was a passing laugh in his eyes, as he caught those of the woman, who smiled at him first familiarly, and then looked suddenly shy. His face, in repose, had a reserve or hardness which did not invite any further conversation.

At length the event occurred for which all the group were waiting. The waves of traffic parted, like those of the Red Sea, and the policeman — the Moses of the crossing — was heard calling, "Pass over." The man with the glossy hat picked his way deliberately, as though he were unaccustomed to dirty boots, and intolerant of them. On reaching the opposite pavement he paused, and looked about him, with the air of one but partly acquainted with the locality. Then, with a little hesitation, he turned his steps westwards, still scanning his landmarks, so far as the fog allowed him. He was in no great hurry, it seemed, to arrive at his destination; but though his progress was dilatory, his movements had strength and character in them. When women met him, he made way for them with instinctive courtesy; but if any male pedestrian accidentally jostled him, his shoulders jerked impatiently, as if to shake off the contact; and before long, when the wheels of an undiscriminating omnibus presumed to plant on his neck a splash of half-liquid mud, "Damn those omnibuses," he exclaimed, with so frank a want of philosophy, that as he rubbed off the contamination with his handkerchief, he laughed to himself at his own vehemence. He chanced at that moment to be at the corner of a dark side street, whose name a corner shop illuminated with garish clearness. The white lettering caught the stranger's eye. He paused in his course, and abruptly took the turning.

It was plain that, in spite of the darkness, he was now confident of his way; for, instead of looking about him, he devoted himself afresh to the task of restoring his outraged neck to its customary sense of cleanliness. The houses on either side were featureless in the sodden air, their sole expression being one of scowling meanness. Reaching the end of this street, the stranger turned into another, where naphtha lamps were flaming on a kind of ghostly market; then into

another, where pawnbrokers' shops abounded, with broken china cups and old concertinas in the windows; then again into another, which was bordered with the backs of warehouses and the gates and long blind walls belonging to some builder's yard. When he emerged from this, however, the character of his surroundings changed. There were rows of lofty windows, and at intervals lamp-lit blinds; in front of one house a private carriage was standing, and through a demure silence went a brisk occasional cab. At the end of this street there was again a change of prospect. There was open darkness, blotted with cloud-like trees, and on either side were the spaces of a really imposing square. Its dim mansions were of almost palatial aspect; they had broad steps, railings of ancient ironwork, and noble doors, with fanlights shining serenely over them.

In the sudden transition from barbarous noise and squalor to this region of secluded and enigmatic magnificence, the stranger was conscious of something that appealed curiously to his imagination. To those who live far west of it, Bloomsbury is a mysterious region, whose very existence would be hardly known to many of them if it did not lie on the way to the stations of three great railways; and its faded, but stately, façades and smoke-begrimed square gardens, islanded far off in the great Maelstrom of business, seem to them like a desolate phantom of Mayfair in Hades. To-night, in the foggy air, this aspect of it was accentuated. The stranger felt himself in some extraordinarily remote country, and he began to wonder whether, if one of these great doors opened, the butler might not have the form of some grotesque goblin. But very soon more practical thoughts invaded him. Should he turn to the left or right? He was once again in perplexity; and he listened attentively, and looked along the hushed pavements searching for some one of whom he might ask the way. Presently, at a little distance, in the faint penumbra of a gas-lamp, he saw a passing figure which seemed that of a gentleman. He hastened after it. His eyesight had not deceived him. A tall hat was in front of him and an overcoat that exhaled respectability.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he said, overtaking the wearer, "but, by chance, could you tell me the way to a place called Startfield Hall?"

The person addressed stood still, and turned to his questioner with a smile. He was a man who was negligently, but by no means ill-attired. His throat was protected by a loosely folded woollen comforter, and a tall document protruded from one of his greatcoat pockets. His large lips, with a sort of compression at their corners, suggested an easy temper hampered by a certain primness, and through his spectacles twinkled the eyes of good manners and of education.

"It is lucky," he said, in a voice that corresponded with his appearance, "that you put that question to me, for many people in this neighbourhood might have been unable to answer it. Startfield Hall is a difficult place to find. Were it only a little later, I would show you the way myself."

"I have," said the other, "been asked to attend a meeting there. I've just been seeing a friend off at St. Pancras Station, and the meeting not being till seven, I have walked to fill up the time."

"Again," said the gentleman with the comforter, "I may congratulate myself on the fact that you addressed me; for I can rectify an error which might otherwise have caused you annoyance. True, the meeting originally was to have taken place at seven. It has been postponed, however, till nine, so as to secure a larger attendance. In the proper course of things you ought to have received a notice."

"I am sure," said the other, "I sincerely thank you for your information. I think if you would tell me how to get to the Hall from here, I shall, when the time comes, be able to find my way."

The gentleman with the comforter hesitated, and looked down. He made a dab at the pavement with an umbrella that had lost all care for its figure. Then he emitted one or two "hems," communicating to the atmosphere a slight smell of ether pills. "Perhaps," he said at last, "if you will excuse my liberty in proposing it, you would spend the intervening time in taking dinner with me. My house — not," he said

with a slightly ironical gesture, "not one of these palaces — is in the adjoining square. I am going to the meeting afterwards, and could then act as your guide. I may perhaps be allowed to introduce myself as being, in my official capacity, not wholly unknown to a certain section of the public. I edit ———," and here he named a high-class monthly review which was widely known by repute, if not very widely circulated. "Prouse Bousefield my name is, and I'm very much at your service." The man with the glossy hat answered with a pleasant laugh. "If it were not for one thing," he said, "I would accept your kindness thankfully. The fact is that you have made yourself a well-known personality to me; but I — even when I have told you that my name is Brandon — I am to you a mere ghost out of the darkness. I might," he added, "be a garotter, or even a Socialist."

A shade of solemnity passed over the features of Mr. Prouse Bousefield. "I am," he said gravely, "not a Socialist myself — that is to say in the common, the secular sense of the word; — far from it. But a great deal of earnest work is being done by some Socialists. I hope, my good sir," he continued, "that your scruples are not serious. I am not afraid of your levanting with my electro-plate."

"Still," said the stranger, "I should like to attest my respectability somehow. I am shy of being taken too completely on trust. How will you prove me? Shall I go through the Greek declensions, or recite you the names of the kings of Judah backwards? There were times at Oxford when I was able to do both."

"Hah! at Oxford were you?" said Mr. Bousefield. "I was at the University of London. I think an *alumnus* of the one institution may break bread with an *alumnus* of the other without putting him through an examination, or asking for testimonials. Startfield Hall, to a great extent, is a University enterprise."

"Well," said the stranger, as the two men began walking, "my scruples yield to your kindness. I must trust to it also to forgive my not being dressed."

For the first time during the conversation Mr. Prouse Bouse-

field laughed, with a little contraction of the mouth as if he had sipped medicine. "Pray," he said, "be quite easy about that. We, I'm afraid, think little about white chokers. This turning, please. There is my house, over yonder. My father, who was a surgeon, practised there for fifty years."

"Perhaps," said the stranger, as they took the turning indicated, "I ought to tell you that at this meeting I shall be altogether an outsider. My wish to attend it arises from the fact that I happen to be the owner of a few ground-rents in the neighbourhood, and if the work to be undertaken at the Hall is of a kind that seems to me useful, I thought I should like to make some contribution to its funds. Before subscribing, however, I wished to form some idea of what this work will be, and what kind of men will undertake it. I accordingly asked my solicitors, whose offices are not far off, to procure me a ticket, which they have done, though I'm sure I don't know how."

Startfield Hall was a new philanthropic institution, intended to form in a poor and disreputable district the headquarters of a band of social and intellectual missionaries. The building as yet had not been formally opened; but to-night there was a preliminary meeting, at which the objects and the programme of the founders were to be set forth for the benefit of a specially invited audience.

"Hum," said Mr. Bousefield, solemnly; "ground-rents, ground-rents! The holding of all landed property is a very serious thing. I don't wonder you should feel prompted to return part of its product to the community. Well, who are the men, you ask, who will manage Startfield Hall. Some of the most active of them will perhaps look in after dinner on their way to the meeting. Remarkable — most remarkable — are many of them, and the women also, one of the women especially. This is my house at last. I must ring, for I've no latchkey."

In another moment a well-varnished door was opened by an alert, but rather dirty, little butler, with a necktie on one side, and the stranger found himself in the interior of Mr. Prouse Bousefield's dwelling. As soon as the light of the

hall-lamp fell on him, he felt that his host, in spite of the confidence he expressed, was eying him as if to see what kind of fish he had caught; and he for his part took refuge in a similar scrutiny, not of his host, but of the place in which his host lived. It was a house of the last century; the entrance passage was wide; beyond was a spacious staircase, and some classical medallions were let here and there into the walls; but the effect of these last was marred by a singularly unclassical barometer, by a hideous stand on which hats hung like decaying fruit, and by a table of pallid oak supporting a plaster bust, a slate scribbled with engagements, a heap of old worsted gloves, and a tarnished metal tray full of dusty visiting cards. The stranger recollected that this had been the house of a surgeon, and he fancied that there still lingered in it a faint odour of anæsthetics.

"Come in here," said Mr. Bousefield, when the two were divested of their overcoats, and he led the way into a firelit apartment at the back, which the stranger felt had been once the surgeon's consulting-room. Mr. Bousefield turned up the gas, letting the light fall on rows of bald volumes bound in what is called "law-calf," and a wide-spreading desk or table piled with docketed papers. "If," he continued, "you would like a wash and brush-up, this is a dressing-room," and he opened a door whilst speaking. "Here are hot water, cold water, towels," he went on with hospitable complacency, "hair-brush, nail-brush, everything. And now, if you will excuse me for a moment, I will acquaint Mrs. Bousefield with your presence, and then bring you up into the drawing-room."

Left alone the stranger found himself confronted by two taps, a basin encrusted with soapsuds, and a limp towel on a roller, like a dirty ghost that had hanged itself. He examined his face in a looking-glass, then looked down at his hands, and they both seemed so infinitely cleaner than the means offered for cleaning them, that he just touched his hair with the tip of a worn-out brush, and at last went back to the sitting-room to await the reappearance of its lord. On either side of the fireplace was an arm-chair covered in leather, on the back of which some assiduous human head had left its mark as in-

delibly as the foot of Buddha upon the rock. The chimney-place was adorned with a pair of facetious zinc figures, their bodies being filled with twine, an inch of which protruded from their mouths; near them was an old toothpick and a box of liquorice lozenges, and in the middle was a faded photographic group, whose rows of faces suggested a private school, but which on nearer inspection might be recognised as a wedding-party. On the hearthrug, by one of the chairs, was a Report on Secondary Education, and a pair of capacious slippers very much down at heel.

Before long Mr. Bousefield reappeared, still in morning dress, clearing his throat like a man who has something important to communicate. He merely said, however: "Mrs. Bousefield will be in the drawing-room presently, ready and delighted to receive you. Meanwhile, for a minute or two, I will warm my feet at the fire. I hope," he added with confidence, "you found everything in there that you required?"

The two men could now for the first time arrive at some clear idea of each other's personal aspect. Mr. Bousefield looked an active sixty. Except for some sandy whiskers his face was clean shaved, and he had the mouth of a barrister, his expression being a curious mixture of geniality and ambushed prudery. As for his guest, his age might have been five and thirty — possibly more, but quite conceivably less, for there was in his air the unsatisfied and impulsive vigour of youth, though his eyes were marked with the lines of those who have outgrown their dreams. His hands, slim but masculine, were remarkably fine in shape; and his dress was the perfection of that tailor's art which conceals its art. Mr. Bousefield's clothes, on the contrary, were ill-fitted though not ill-made, and his preparations for dinner had obviously not been elaborate, for his waistcoat, which was creased into little terraces of cloth, still retained some bread-crumbs — the deposits of a previous meal. He seemed, indeed, to have made no change except in putting on a pair of boots — boots with elastic sides — the soles of which he was now engaged in toasting. "Quite sure," he said, with a half-wink at his guest, "that you won't have yours sent down to be dried?

Slippers there, if you will." Mr. Bousefield, his guest perceived, was a man who had two manners. So long as he was distant or spoke on impersonal subjects his address possessed refinement and a certain unaffected dignity; but it tended to be a little underbred the moment it approached intimacy. There was accordingly the faintest touch of coldness in the guest's courteous refusal of his host's inviting offer. Mr. Bousefield felt it, being in some ways morbidly sensitive; but on this occasion he was not to be discomposed by coldness. He had a communication in readiness which would vindicate his own value. He had been longing for five minutes to make it, and now out it came.

"I find," he said, "that this evening you will meet a personage — I have only just heard for certain that she could come — we are expecting her every moment — I think I may call her one of the most famous women in Europe. I mean Mrs. Norham — *the* Mrs. Norham, the authoress. Her person and personality are quite as brilliant as her intellect."

Mrs. Norham was beyond all doubt a celebrity. She had written a novel with a purpose which, despite its length and its solemnity, had achieved an enormous circulation, and had raised her to the ranks of a prophetess. She was now surrounded by a clique of admiring worshippers who would have taken her, were that possible, even more seriously than she took herself. She was consequently in full career of what may be called ethical dissipation; and just as a frivolous young lady is miserable if she is not going to a ball, Mrs. Norham was miserable if she was not in some reforming movement. She enjoyed the delightful experience of feeling that the world needed her — that the masses needed her help, that statesmen needed her hints, and that the fashionable class, corrupt and frivolous as it was, needed the discipline of her somewhat acidulated contempt. If only her performances had come up to her hopes, she would already have been weeping, like Alexander, because there were no more abuses to conquer.

Mr. Prouse Bousefield was obviously one of this lady's votaries. His figure appeared to swell as he announced himself the proprietor of an acquaintance with her. His eyes gleamed,

and the radiance of Mrs. Norham's spirit shone on his face in the humble disguise of perspiration. His guest, feeling what was required of him, showed himself much impressed with the prospect of the honour in store for him; and in order to prove himself worthy of it, began with a courteous gravity to inquire about Mrs. Norham's religion. Mr. Bousefield's mouth became very grave, and he wiped his spectacles.

"Ah," he replied reflectively, "in some of the very highest minds there is a temporary failure to see religious truth completely. And yet we may say that in Mrs. Norham's unbelief there is more of true Christianity than in much that masquerades under the name. Indeed," said Mr. Bousefield, with a long and weighty suspiration, "it may help her under Providence in being a new apostle to the Gentiles, and in drawing back those who unhappily have lost faith, to that religion which she imagines to be a substitute for Christianity, but is really only Christianity, if I may say so reverentially, with its face washed. Columbus thought when he had discovered a new world that he had only discovered a new coast of the old. Mrs. Norham has really rediscovered a new side of the old religion when she imagines in her sanguine nobleness that she has discovered one which is new. At all events, she is so near to revealed truth that she represents the very highest which human nature can reach without it. To know her," he was obviously about to say, "is a liberal education." But the sound of a bell arrested him. "Hark!" he said, "there she is. Yes, yes; you can hear her voice in the passage. We'll let her take off her cloak, and then we will go up."

CHAPTER III

The stranger felt some curiosity as he mounted the staircase with his host, and was ushered into a bleak apartment with a rose-wood table in the middle of it, on which, by way of ornament, stood a large shining microscope, some empty magenta-coloured glasses meant to contain flowers, and an unfinished stocking transfixed with some steel knitting needles. On the top of a cottage piano stood a row of disused lamps, and in front of each curtained window was a group of stuffed humming birds. He was aware, as he entered, of the presence of three ladies. One of them, whose hair had a false appearance of being in curl-papers, and who wore at her throat a square cameo brooch, advanced to him with a flurried shyness, and said, "How do you do, Mr. Brandon? Mr. Bousefield and I are very much pleased to see you. This," she went on, speaking with a slight Scotch accent, and indicating a little square-faced body, with an artlessly false front, "is my friend, Miss Brisket; and —" She paused nervously, like a person awaiting an opportunity. Then, with a gasp, and with more awe than cordiality in her voice, "Mrs. Norham," she said, "allow me to introduce Mr. Brandon. Mr. Brandon — Mrs. Norham; Mrs. Norham — Mr. Brandon."

The stranger looked, and he saw before him a lady with pretty and penetrating eyes, but a somewhat bony face. Her hair was drawn from her temples with a studied and severe simplicity; and at the back of her head was a comb with a gilt disc attached to it, which made her face look as though set in a tarnished aureole; whilst her frame was draped in a species of dim blue bed-gown, of the pattern supposed to be affected by mediæval saints in heaven.

Mrs. Norham responded to the stranger's bow stiffly. "Mr. Bousefield tells me," she said, "that you are interested in Startfield Hall."

"No one," interrupted Mr. Bousefield, "can tell you more about it than Mrs. Norham. It's really owing to her that the whole thing has been started. These Oxford and Cambridge men have all lit their pipes at hers."

Mrs. Norham, whilst her praise was in progress, indulged in a modest frown, and pressed against her lips a finger which retained some stains of ink on it. At this moment, however, the little untidy butler announced, with a chirrup, that dinner was "quite ready"; and Mr. Bousefield, giving his arm to the prophetess, was followed by the stranger and his hostess, who carried her knitting with her, Miss Brisket bringing up the rear. The dinner, in spite of the gentilities of Mr. Bousefield's electro-plate, and the splendour of two biscuit-boxes with Japanese fans engraved on them, was better than the stranger anticipated when he seated himself, and extracted his napkin from a curious cloth ring ornamented with patterns in worsted-work. Indeed, presently, when Mrs. Bousefield asked him, "Is that soup to your taste?" he was able to answer without much hypocrisy, "It is excellent." "Mr. Bousefield," she rejoined archly, "is very particular with his eating. He does not think he is; but he is."

This struck the stranger as singularly unambitious conversation for a dinner-table graced by the presence of Mrs. Norham; but he was touched and amused by detecting the reverential and yet protecting affection of his hostess for her intellectual spouse. He was unable, however, to reflect upon this fact long; for one ear was hardly left vacant by the details of Mr. Bousefield's fastidiousness, before the other was filled with the accents of Mrs. Norham herself, who was excitedly defending, against some amendment suggested by her host, a sentence in an article by herself, which he was about to publish in his Review. "If you alter my phrase," she was saying, tapping the tablecloth with her finger-tips, "you destroy the whole point I am elucidating, — that all ethical energising is functional — that the object of it is altruistic — the lighten-

ing of the life-burden and the enlarging of the minds of others. The religious theory, or, as I call it, duplicated selfism — "

The stranger was prevented from hearing the rest of the sentence, for his attention was again arrested by Mrs. Bousefield, who was saying to her friend Miss Brisket, "And so, dear, you were dining last night with Dr. Bingin? And what sort of table does the new Mrs. Bingin keep? And have they a man, or will they still be going on with a table-maid?"

Then Mrs. Norham's voice was dominant once again. "Yes," she was exclaiming in inspired and quivering accents, "the life-long surrender of one's own likes and dislikes, not only to the needs of the great helpless multitudes, but even to the weak likings of our less enlightened equals — "

The stranger was anxious to hear how this noble self-surrender was to be rewarded; but his hostess, seeing that he was silent, and fearing he felt neglected, came to his rescue with a question which took his breath away with its seeming irrelevancy. "Mr. Brandon," she said, "are you fond of cats?" He started and turned towards her. She was stroking a coal-black feline head which had lifted itself to the level of the table. "Look at him," she said; "poor pussums, isn't he just a beauty? Mr. Prouse Bousefield is particularly fond of Tomkins. Every morning, before he begins his breakfast, he always says to me, 'Elizabeth, — the cat.' That means that Tomkins is to have his milk in the slop-basin."

Unfortunately, Mr. Bousefield happened to overhear this anecdote. "Pooh, my dear," he exclaimed. "Why do you tell these foolish stories to Mr. Brandon?" Mrs. Norham was interrupted as she was articulating the word "selflessness." She turned her head, and exclaimed with a shriek, "A cat in the room! Oh, I can't bear cats. Take it away — please."

"I assure you," began Mrs. Bousefield, "that Tomkins will scratch nobody." But Mrs. Norham had already half risen from her seat.

"Harry," cried Mr. Bousefield to his servant, a sudden thunder-storm on his brow, "take it out of the room. Gently, man. Don't chivy it — that's not the way to catch it. There

— there — hold it gently. Now give it to Sarah, and have it locked up in the coal-hole."

Mrs. Norham, after her outburst of selflessness, sank back appeased into her chair. The whole room recovered as though from a sudden palpitation of the heart; and presently the sight of a dish of lobster patties restored Mr. Bousefield's face to something like Christian calm. The stranger now seized on a favourable opportunity, while Mr. Bousefield was being asked by his wife "whether that crust ate crisp enough," to engage Mrs. Norham in a little conversation on his own account.

"Do you think," he said, "you would be sufficiently altruistic to enlarge my mind with regard to Startfield Hall? I have particular reasons for wishing to know what its founders aim at."

Mrs. Norham was horrified by this flippant manner of appealing to her. She turned to her questioner with a lofty and petrifying stare, and said ungraciously, "May I ask, are you on the press?" The stranger answered, "No," with an easy laugh of amusement. "What, then, is he?" thought Mrs. Norham, puzzled. "Is he a clerk in some neighbouring bank? or an impertinent, airified solicitor?"

The stranger, however, interrupted her speculations by saying in a quiet voice, "I have been thinking, as I told our host, of becoming a subscriber to the enterprise; but I want first to be a little more sure of its aims. I might, if these satisfied me, give perhaps a considerable sum."

Mrs. Norham again stared at him. The rich were amongst the objects of her most systematic satire; but at the thought that her neighbour might be one of them, her manner instantly softened.

"Well," she said, still with a note of asperity in her voice, "our aim — *my* aim — for the movement is really mine, though other brains more powerful than mine are helping me — is to elevate, not by any directly economic means, but by culture, by thought, by varied and multitudinous knowledge, that great blind, dumb, helpless, unthinking, piteously brutalised multitude, by whom," continued Mrs. Norham, who, satisfied that the stranger was watching her, fixed a rapt look on the cornice,

and cultivated a moisture in her eyes — "by whom," she continued slowly, "all the greatness, all the wealth, all the comforts, all the refinements, all the luxury, of this and of all countries are made."

"You should surely add," said the stranger, with courteous gravity, "all the great poetry, and all the scientific discoveries; for these are the work of the piteously brutalised multitudes also. I think I follow your meaning. You would impart to them some of the knowledge of which they possess nothing, but which we — the educated — have nevertheless derived from them. You would give them a taste, I suppose, for political and social speculation, for art, for literature, for languages — possibly for the masterpieces of modern Parisian fiction."

Mrs. Norham never understood and rarely detected badinage. "I would teach them," she began. "But you — perhaps you do not realise what we owe them — how that we owe them all we enjoy, and how that they are shut out from all — how that the only life worthy of being called life is at present confined, by a mere iniquitous maladjustment, to the few. Oh," continued Mrs. Norham, gasping, and changing the construction of her sentence, "I would teach them to feel life's unspeakable riches, its deep and profound affections, and to know the glory of its great outlooks. It is early to talk about providing equal wealth for all; but our object is to show, by practical demonstration, that it is possible to provide even now equal culture for all. Here we have the religion of pure democracy — of the new collectivism — of the religion that is reforming the world — the religion of the coming century. And this," she added, turning to Mr. Bousefield with a smile, "may be the religion alike of those who believe in dogmas and who disbelieve in them."

"Nobly put," exclaimed Mr. Bousefield, "nobly put!" and he shook Mrs. Norham by her hand, which happened to be reposing on the tablecloth. Mrs. Bousefield, who had sought refuge in her knitting, glanced with anything but approbation at this religious rite; but she merely continued the information which she happened to be imparting to Miss Brisket.

"Mr. Prouse Bousefield," she was saying, "would catch his death of cold if I did not give him his socks of this extra thickness, and always made him change his feet when he came in from walking."

The stranger, anxious to draw a veil over these delicate domestic details, addressed himself again to Mrs. Norham, speaking a little louder than before. "But still," he said, "for me, so far as Startfield Hall is concerned, a certain practical question remains. Let us grant that it is feasible and desirable to give all this instruction to the masses. A great deal will depend on the bias and character of the men you select as teachers. May I ask what sort of people — people with what sort of talents and sympathies — will be the friars of your new order?"

Mrs. Norham, who misinterpreted the loudness of the stranger's voice into an attempt to insult herself, or at least to talk her down, exclaimed, "You had better ask that with regard to the English Episcopate, or the House of Lords, or any other body of which the best that can be said is that it is a fortuitous concurrence of mediocrities. Our coadjutors in the present movement are the picked intelligences of the country — masters of the new criticism, the new economics, the new political philosophy; the men who are making England — the world rather — that is to be. To-night, on the platform you will hear a group of them."

"Yes," interrupted Mr. Bousefield, "and you will see one or two before then — here, in this room. That's one of them, called Tibbits, a really wonderful genius. He's a little soured perhaps by his failure to get a most remarkable invention, which would quite revolutionise the bicycle trade, taken up by any capitalist — I must see myself presently what I can do to help him — but really full of noble feeling for the wrongs and aspirations of his class. You'll like to meet him, Mr. Brandon, although he's a bit rough. He'll show you what stuff is in the people of this country. There will be a poet — Squelch — whose genius, under Mrs. Norham's encouragement, is really likely to do something very fine indeed. He's a volume of poems coming out next month. Hark! the bell.

That's one of them — Tibbits, or Poulton, or both; perhaps Squelch too. Poulton, Mr. Brandon, was a scholar of John's, Cambridge. He's our secretary at the Hall. Excuse me, Mrs. Norham, I'll go out and bring them in."

Mr. Bousefield was no sooner gone than Mrs. Norham turned to the stranger, and said in a solemn undertone, "I couldn't speak of it when he was here, for he, you know, is a member of some Nonconformist connection; but the hope of the most advanced of us is that, by hastening the extinction of fabulous and theistic Christianity, we shall liberate those forces which reside in the passionate brotherliness of man, and have hitherto wasted themselves in beautiful but useless aspirations." Mrs. Norham sighed. It was one of her favourite beliefs about herself that she was secretly broken-hearted, because the fatal strength of her intellect had forced her to abandon the faith which she regarded as so pernicious. "And," she continued, "to make this passionate brotherliness the great compelling force which shall vitalise the new movement, which shall, indeed, make the many new movements one."

"This is right. Here are some of us," said Mr. Bousefield, re-entering and ushering into the room a short man and a tall one. The former, who was introduced as Mr. Tibbits, was like a pale mechanic in the clothes of a prosperous sea-captain, and his face was drawn and haggard with a sense of its own importance. The latter, who was sandy-haired, and had an air of tutorial aggressiveness, was arrayed in evening dress, and a red silk handkerchief protruded from between his shirt and waistcoat. The stranger was presently conscious that this exquisite was just behind him, and saying to him, with the brusqueness of a schoolmaster speaking to a boy, "Will you move a little, and allow me to get my chair in?" The stranger turned, and, eying the speaker in astonishment, saw that he was preparing to push himself between him and the prophetess.

"Here, Poulton," cried Mr. Bousefield, reddening as he chanced to perceive the situation, "sit you down between Mrs. Norham and me. And now, Mr. Tibbits, let me give you a glass of wine; something to take the taste of the fog out

of your mouth, eh? Or shall Mrs. Bousefield send you a cup of coffee?"

"Well," said Mr. Tibbits, with a judicial frown, as if deliberating whether he should confer a favour or no, "I don't care if I do take a cup of coffee;" and he showed his ease by planting his blue serge elbows on the table. The aspect of the banquet had by this time been changed. Mrs. Bousefield's plate and her wineglasses — all except one in which she kept her ball of wool — had been removed, and their place was taken by a large japanned tray, on which was a coffee-pot and a phalanx of capacious cups. Whilst Mr. Tibbits was imbibing his coffee with an air of grudging satisfaction, Mr. Poulton had spread a paper in front of him, and was pointing out to Mrs. Norham and Mr. Bousefield the names of the various speakers who had engaged to address the meeting, and was discussing, in a business-like undertone, the order in which they should do so. "Bousefield takes the chair," he was saying. "Then Mrs. Norham speaks. What will your line be? General, I suppose, rather general?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Norham. "I shall dwell principally on the spirit that animates all of us, and fuses, as I was saying just now, our several endeavours into one."

"In that case," said Mr. Poulton, "I think I had better follow you. My idea is to take the present war craze as a text, and to show that war, which is the mere game of aristocracies, represents everything which is antithetic to the new movement."

"Good," said Mr. Tibbits, who was now leaning across the table to listen, with a strained expression, as if determined not to be left out of the discussion. "War never did anything for this or for any other country. I have said that often, and I'm not ashamed of saying it."

"And then," said Mr. Poulton, "when I have worked that and shown that what really makes a nation is literature, philosophical thought, and the highest culture for all, you, Tibbits, will you come after me, and show how this means the emancipation of labour, and the extinction of all aristocracies, by the process of leaving them behind as a profligate, frivolous,

useless, and obviously inferior residuum? Does that suit your book?"

"It's plain," said Mr. Tibbits, who was not entirely pleased at having the word put into his mouth so glibly, "it's quite plain that you've heard *me* speak pretty often. Yes, yes, you may trust that matter to me."

"And now," resumed Mr. Poulton, again addressing Mrs. Norham, "I thought we would have the specialists, each on his own subjects — philosophy, art, poetry, history. Squelch can say something if he is not in too fine a frenzy. Will you glance at the names kindly, and see if you approve the order? All the speakers, except yourself, are, you see, thus far men. I don't know if you'd care for one or two other women."

Mrs. Norham wrinkled her brows, and said, after a moment's thought, "Perhaps not to-night. In a year or two's time, when the character of all womanhood is changed, our chief speakers will be women, mayhap. At present, except in brilliant, but exceptional, cases, there is a tendency in them to wander, to miss the precise issue. Besides, all the vital points, in which women's nature is interested, I shall have touched on myself. On the whole then — "

As she was speaking the door opened. A breath of scent was perceptible, accompanied by a rustle of flounces, and the voice of the little butler announced "Mrs. Delia Dickson." The stranger noticed that at the sound Mrs. Norham's countenance underwent a sudden change, and became expressive of a fluttering something which, whatever it was, was not passionate brotherliness. Mrs. Dickson, like Mrs. Norham, had also achieved celebrity by a novel with a purpose, and was in her own way a prophetess likewise; but whereas Mrs. Norham proposed to reform society by the comparatively simple process of civilising the masses who were the makers of civilisation already, Mrs. Dickson was persuaded that so important a miracle depended on nothing less than a revolution in character of the human male, a revolution, however, which she was persuaded would soon be accomplished by Woman if only, as Mrs. Dickson said, "the light of her pure eyes" was shed with sufficient fulness on the dark vices of man. She,

at any rate, was undeserving of Mrs. Norham's late strictures on her sex; for the vice of man being thus her fundamental theme, in none of her many pages had she ever for a moment wandered from it. Her appearance was, and was meant to be, in strong contrast to her reputation. Her fair, curling hair was cut short like a boy's; but in every other respect her aspect was ultra-feminine. She was tall and willowy, and, unlike Mrs. Norham's, her waist was noticeably the slimmest part of her person. Her dress, indeed, was a symbol of fashion chained to the car of virtue; and as she came into the dining-room, she seemed to fill up three parts of it, she moved with such a noise of silk and such a tinkle of bangles. She held her chin in front of her by means of a long neck, and her eager eyes and her large half-opened mouth conveyed the idea that she was about to gasp with feeling.

"Ah, Mr. Bousefield," she exclaimed, "how good it is to be here. Dear Mrs. Bousefield, no, not any coffee, thank you."

Half in shyness, and half in sullen protest, Mr. Tibbits had edged away from the proximity of this new apparition, and as soon as she and her skirts were seated in the vacancy left by him, "I've had such a to-do," she continued, "to come here on my way, but I thought it best to make quite certain beforehand when I should speak and how long I should have. Then I wanted to tell you that, of course, I would say nothing about organisation and business, and so forth, but confine myself to vital questions. I will simply say a word of appeal to the wives and mothers — and, above all, to the girls who are to be wives and mothers some day. I will just stir them up with a few fresh statistics which a cowardly Government won't allow to be printed even in a Blue-Book. That will show them that we mean to go to the root of things."

"We certainly mean to do *so* much," said Mrs. Norham, drily.

Mrs. Norham was a woman whose temperament inclined her to no frailties; she had been brought up, moreover, in a strictly puritanical circle; but a year or two ago she had converted herself into a complete woman of the world by adopting the theory that vice was not wicked but stupid, describing the dramas which had their catastrophes in the Divorce Court as

"poor foolish affairs, with not even novelty to recommend them." She doubled, by this proceeding, the riches of her inward life, uniting the puritan's pleasure of looking down on the vicious with the worldling's pleasure of looking down on the puritan. Both these feelings combined in a subtle way to fill her with reserved disapproval of Mrs. Delia Dickson, which was not diminished by the fact that she saw in her an intruding rival, and, what was still worse, an ill-coloured caricature of herself.

"Dear Mrs. Norham," said Mrs. Dickson, "it's cheering to hear you say so. We always have known that you were heart and soul with us."

"The woman," said Mrs. Norham in Mr. Poulton's ear, "must be mad — stark, staring mad."

"And so, Mr. Bousefield," continued Mrs. Dickson, beaming at him with her ecstatic glance, "my subject being at the root of things, I suppose I ought to speak early."

Mr. Bousefield, though personally he was the adherent of Mrs. Norham, agreed more with Mrs. Dickson than with her in his feelings about male depravity. "Yours is," he said, "a most important subject, truly."

"Let her," whispered Mrs. Norham to Mr. Poulton, "have her way and have done with it — before you, if you like — anything to keep her quiet."

Mr. Poulton raised his voice. "I'm afraid," he said, "Mrs. Dickson, the earlier part of the programme will not bear much altering. If you speak early, the time we can give you will be limited. Still, if you like to follow directly after me — "

Here Mr. Tibbits, with eyes burning above his hollow cheeks, leaned forward and said, "As an orator of some slight experience — I've been accustomed to address thousands, I have — ay, and tens of thousands — every one here, I should say, knows that of me — I suggest that the speeches be in the order of the urgency of the subjects. Mr. Chairman, of course, comes first, then the most important subject, which none of us here deny is the emancipation of labour. I don't say that because it puts me forward."

"Nay," said Mr. Bousefield, mindful of Mrs. Norham's precedence, "but before we touch on the emancipation of labour,

we should have what this lady will say as to the motives that lead us to desire it."

"These things," said Mr. Poulton, "are usually settled by the secretary. It's a pity," he added, "that we can't all speak at once."

The difficulties of the situation, which threatened to become insuperable, were dissipated for the moment by a very unexpected agency. In the awkward silence that had followed Mr. Poulton's sarcasm, Miss Brisket, who was straightening out her hostess's knitted stocking, was overheard saying in an undertone, "And if Mr. Bousefield would only use that embrocation also, I'm sure he need never be troubled with one chilblain again." Mrs. Bousefield, however, made no direct reply to her. Her eyes had strayed towards a clock on the chimney-piece, and she quietly remarked, "I'm thinking it's time you were all of you at Startfield Hall. It's just on the stroke of nine, and your friends will be there waiting for you, and shivering in that damp room where the plaster is just weeping, and where Mr. Prouse Bousefield caught his last sciatica."

Goethe tells us that the cure for doubt is action, and at Mrs. Bousefield's words the reformers started from their seats incontinently, content for the moment to accept the secretary's assurance that he would arrange everything in a way that would satisfy everybody; though they were, it must be confessed, severally haunted by the conviction that it would be easier to satisfy the human race as a whole, than the few select members of it by whom it was then represented. Mrs. Delia Dickson, who had a hired carriage in waiting, persuaded Mrs. Bousefield and Miss Brisket to go with her; whilst Mr. Poulton, whose feet were in varnished shoes, begged to be taken with them, in order, he said, that he might have everything ready by the time the chairman, with his influential friends, arrived. These last, it seemed, were, as a matter of course, to walk. "We all walk in Bloomsbury," said Mrs. Norham severely to the stranger, as she muffled her head and her aureole in a pink and white woollen shawl; and the front door presently let them into the chilly night, where mud glimmered, and gaslights floated in a bilious haze.

CHAPTER IV

THE Hall, which was reached through a maze of intricate alleys, was a pale-coloured brick building, overshadowed by an enormous brewery, and it still filled the street with odours of lime and varnish. A red lamp indicated the private entrance; a policeman, who stood by it, gravely saluted those who hoped, in a few years' time, to render his profession superfluous; and the chairman and his friends were soon in a sort of waiting-room, which was hung with hats and cloaks, and filled with dingy individuals obviously impatient to accompany them on to the platform. A stamping of feet was heard in the great lecture-room adjoining, which Mrs. Norham assumed was caused by a rumour of her own advent, till a half-open door gave her a glimpse of the platform, and on the platform Mrs. Delia Dickson bowing.

"Mrs. Norham," cried Mr. Bousefield, pushing his way up to her, and towing after him a tall, bearded individual with cavernous eyes, and a lurking air of opulence, "will you go with Mr. Hermon and lead the way to the platform?" Mr. Hermon was known as an advanced Radical, and he had given the site on which Startfield Hall stood. He had made a large fortune in Manchester, and had now invested it in America, so that none of the base timidities resulting from self-interest should hamper him in his advocacy of experiments on the rights of property at home. The platform, which was occupied by two or three ladies already, was now promptly filled, and Mrs. Norham's ruffled composure was satisfied by seeing Mrs. Dickson obliged to move from her chair to another which was less conspicuous. As for the stranger, he secured a position by the wall which gave him a comprehensive view alike of the speakers and the audience. The latter was not numerous, but had an air of lugubrious attention.

Mr. Bousefield, amongst his present surroundings, appeared like a perfect gentleman. Having briefly stated that the purpose of to-night's meeting was to explain to those interested the objects of Startfield Hall, that questions and suggestions would be invited at the end of the proceedings, and that something would be said on the subject of subscriptions and donations, he read from a scrap of notepaper the names of a number of persons who had written to express their regret at being unable to be present, winding up with a letter — which was evidently his trump card — from a bishop, who advocated Socialism from the security of his Episcopal palace, and now briefly alluded to a proposal, recently put forward by him in the *Times*, that an experiment in Socialism might, at all events, be profitably made by committing the construction of the ships of the British fleet to gangs of co-operative workmen, unhampered by any masters. At this point Mr. Poulton, though the advocate of a Socialism of his own, could not refrain from remarking, in a whisper to Mrs. Norham, that if all the nations of the world would join in the same experiment, naval warfare, at all events, would be happily made impossible. Unconscious of this criticism, Mr. Bousefield went on to say: "And the letter of this good bishop winds up with a touching passage: 'The apostle in Patmos, when he saw the ideal city, did not see the toiling multitudes taken up to it in the heavens. He saw the new Jerusalem coming down out of the heavens to earth.'" Here a little man, like a gipsy — till lately an Oxford "coach" — who wore a pilot jacket and a pair of lavender gloves, and who was not only a Socialist, but also, in the opinion of his admirers, the most formidable critic that theism had yet encountered, began humming under his breath, to the tune of an old music-hall song, "Oh, Jerusalem, Jerusalem," and ended with a suppressed giggle. "And now," Mr. Bousefield proceeded, "I have only to remind you of this — that Startfield Hall is, before all things, a religious institution. Now religion, as we all know, is apt to mean different things for different people who are equally earnest and conscientious; but there is one part of it which such people, and I hope all of us, all hold in common. This part

of religion, which we all hold in common, is the religion of social endeavour, and it is to the practice of this that Startfield Hall will be consecrated, all elements of dispute being left by us in the street outside. Among the comrades of the new church there will be one grace, at all events, the beautiful grace of unanimity and fraternal love. I will not, however, trouble you with my own halting words, for in another moment this subject will be eloquently dealt with by one who is not only the clearest of modern thinkers, the most incisive of modern writers, the most elevated of modern teachers, the most practical of modern leaders, but is, at the same time, in our present sense of the word, the most religious of modern women. Ladies and gentlemen, helpers and fellow-workers, I now call upon Mrs. Norham to address you."

Mrs. Norham, who, when Mr. Bousefield began on religion, had at first been afraid that he was taking the bread out of her own mouth, underwent, as he proceeded, a change both of expression and attitude. Her face turned slowly upwards, till it reached the angle of aspiration, and the spirit of truth, as it breathed through Mr. Bousefield's simple mention of her, made her bosom heave like that of the Delphic Pythoness. Her clearness of thought having been adequately vouched for by him, she considered it superfluous to burden her speech with proofs of it. She indulged rather in those generalities which, rich in their possible meanings, find their way to so many more human hearts than the lean and meagre propositions which can signify one thing only. Her speech was an amplification of what she had said to the stranger at dinner. Startfield Hall, she began, was to be a centre of Socialism — she was not afraid of the word — but of Socialism in its broadest sense. "Socialism," she said, "is not an academic theory of commercial values, nor fanciful scheme of rules for some imaginary national workshop. It is a mood of mind — or shall I call it a condition of the emotions — which reveals to us the great social truth, the truth that all are equal in the deep, the burning sense that all have equal rights in the heritage of personal civilisation, and that all are naturally capable of becoming equally civilised. Some persons think

that they can make this right a reality by political and legislative means, by abolition, for instance, of that absurdity the House of Lords, or by strikes, and so forth. Others, and I confess myself to be one of them, think that all this is putting the cart before the horse. They think that when once men are all equal in culture, caste and privilege will become meaningless, and all degrading labour impossible. Everybody will then realise the very highest of which he or she is capable. However, let those who believe in political means try them. Startfield Hall will work by other means, but it will work for the same end. It will aim at making mental equality a fact so far as its influence goes, trusting that other equalities will follow. We shall not, however, expect to conquer the world at a blow. We shall try to make our efforts complete within the circle of our own influence, and others will follow our example. But although you will thus see that we are sober and practical people, and no mere emotional dreamers, we are not for that reason unemotional. Nay," exclaimed Mrs. Norham, her voice rising, "emotion is our life. We are instinct with all the burning fire of brotherliness, which some of us think is so inadequately expressed in Christianity, and which for us is baptised with a new and a holier name — the holy name of Altruism — Altruism, which is merely social emotion made functional, if I may use the technical terms of the theology of the new religion." Startfield Hall, Mrs. Norham went on to say, was to be a temple of this holy principle, which elsewhere, no doubt, was at present perplexingly conspicuous by its absence, but would here give evidence of its compelling and universal force. Loving cultured men, and palpitating cultured women, would introduce Schiller to the dustman, and Shakespeare's Sonnets to the dog-stealer; whilst the seamstress would be inoculated with those gracious æsthetic appreciations which should make her despise the best lodgings she was ever likely to occupy. "And thus," continued Mrs. Norham, "those who have made for us all our pleasures will receive them back again at our hands, richer for the love that comes with them."

Mrs. Norham's voice ceased, as though her speech had

come to its conclusion. But to the surprise and perplexity of every one, and more especially of the chairman, she still remained standing, and suddenly she began again. "I fear," she said with a peculiarly engaging smile, that was first directed to the audience, and then to the chairman at her side, "I fear I am going to do something sadly out of order. It is arranged, I see on our programme, that our secretary shall next address you; but with the chairman's kind permission I will ask, before sitting down, that one whose presence here I have only this moment perceived shall give to my poor words a completeness I cannot give them myself. The person to whom I refer is an example of what I have just been saying. He is an example of the highest and rarest genius bursting at the touch of culture, through the husk of adverse circumstance. I refer to our brother and fellow-labourer, Mr. Squelch, whose wonderful poems, which thus far have been shown to a few friends only, will shortly be given to the world in a volume called *Chants of Equality*. Just ask him," whispered Mrs. Norham stooping to Mr. Bousefield's ear as she sat down, "to come forward and say a word or two. It will do them all good to see him."

Mr. Poulton scowled, and then tried to look indifferent. The chairman himself seemed a little taken aback, but he promptly and almost hurriedly did what his Egeria had suggested to him. In response to his brief summons, and heralded by some shuffling, a singular object, plainly with his own consent, was hustled forward to the brink of the platform. His hair, thrust wildly from his forehead, was of such unrestrained exuberance that it hung on the back of his head like a dilapidated lady's chignon. He wore a black velveteen jacket, a low and very dirty collar, and a red necktie, the glorious symbol of revolution. His face, which was white and sodden, suggested a mixture of weakness and self-assertion; and there was in his eyes a pale and shifting glare. He was so overpowered by feeling that he had some difficulty in steadying himself, but presently found his balance and voice at the same moment, and boldly striking his velveteen breast with his hand, he exclaimed in a voice which seemed to come

out of his boots, "Comrades, camerados mine, as my master, Whitman, would call you — Walt Whitman — the singer of Democracy, Walt — every great, glorious revolutionary movement has had its singer, and has gone marching to his songs. You have not heard of me yet, camerados, but you will. To my songs you will march. Ladies and gentlemen, you will hear of me — me, the Whitman, the Byron, the Shelley, the Hugo of the new order." Mr. Squelch suddenly paused. Emotion made him sway once more. "This glorious thought," he gasped, "is too much for me. You will be proud one day — you will one day tell your children that you once saw — once heard *me*." Mr. Squelch's eyes began to overflow with tears. He looked wildly on either side of him. Mr. Hermon, with adroit rapidity, being a wiry man, caught him as he was about to fall, and aided by some other Altruists, restored him to his original seclusion. Mr. Poulton watched his retirement, and sniffed up a certain odour which accompanied it.

"It was too much for him," gasped Mrs. Norham. "Hadn't some one better get him a little brandy?"

"Give him some gin," muttered Mr. Poulton, "a hair of the dog that bit him."

This cynical insinuation, however, was lost upon Mrs. Norham, for her ear had been captured by Mr. Bousefield, who was once more on his legs. "He's all right," he was saying in good-natured and reassuring accents. "We must all thank him for — we must all be encouraged by — those feelings whose depth alone has interfered with his expression of them. And now," Mr. Bousefield continued, resuming his official tone, "I will call on Mr. Dundas Poulton, of St. John's College, Cambridge, our honorary secretary, to address you." He had hardly finished speaking before Mr. Poulton had risen, belligerent superiority on his brow, and had begun with the accents of a schoolmaster lecturing his lowest class.

"Mrs. Norham," he said, "has told you that we aim at securing equal culture for all. Now, culture, as no doubt you know, means a general appreciation of the higher pleasures, and the higher truths of life. But culture of this general kind, if it is ever to become universal, must be preceded by cul-

ture with regard to social conditions; and the first social truth which we must set ourselves to popularise is this — that war, and all that under any circumstances makes for war, from the primary obstacles to the programme so brilliantly sketched out by Mrs. Norham. And why? The reason is plain. War is the glorification, the result, and the prop, of limited class interests. No people, in the true sense of the word, ever willingly fought with another people, or ever has had, or can have, any cause of quarrel with them." So far Mr. Poulton was rewarded with no other applause than silence, but it was otherwise when he went on to explain who the authors of all war were — when he declared that they were none other than the so-called aristocratic classes, who wasted, according to him, "their non-existent intellectual powers, in those homes of dissipation, of card-sharping, drunkenness, and inane self-indulgence, commonly spoken of as the best clubs in London." "Hear, hear," exclaimed several voices, and there was a distinct clapping of hands, and some stamping of feet. "In more senses than one," said Mr. Poulton, exhibiting the silk facings of his coat as witnesses to his knowledge of the world, "in more senses than one, the War Office is in Pall Mall." Here the clapping and stamping became loud and long. "In these best clubs," continued Mr. Poulton, with withering irony, "these best clubs — save the mark! — you will find your lords and gentlemen lying on their gilded couches, or straddling on their gilded chairs — men with hands hardly steady enough to lift their liqueur brandy to their lips, roaring with delight over the prospect of a new war. And why? They have not even the excuse of possessing the fighting instinct of the brutes. They don't like war because they want to fight themselves; besides, an officer, as you know, is rarely within range of a bullet. These drones like war because they believe that war is this — a means of distracting the attention of the people as a whole from the real forces on which society rests: and furthermore, because it presents the people with a false ideal of character — that ideal of obedience and so-called bravery which makes the soldier a slave, instead of an ideal of altruistic self-development which will render the meanest

incapable of obeying or even of recognising any superior. This latter ideal is the ideal of Startfield Hall, but till military strife is abolished, that ideal will never be realised. Here," continued Mr. Poulton, adopting a cold, academic manner, "here we have the reason why a revolt against militarism, and the conception of duty involved in it, is a precedent condition of any true renascence of the people. Here we have the reason why our lecturers in this Hall will devote so much time to the extinction of the military, and even the patriotic spirit. For what is patriotism? It is a crime of *lèse majesté* against man. Make war impracticable then, by the fact that you yourselves see through it. You can do this if you will only believe that you can. If you believe that it is possible to do a thing, you have already more than half done it; and if you will only believe that it is possible to abolish war, I tell you that then it will be possible for you to believe anything."

Mr. Poulton's peroration was received with a burst of enthusiasm which was well calculated to encourage earnest reformers, though hardly as vehement as that which, a few minutes before, had greeted his description of the "best clubs in London."

The excitement, however, rose again when Mr. Poulton was succeeded by Mr. Tibbits, who, since he was not the first speaker, was determined to be at least the most forcible, and also added to the effect of his words by a remarkable variety of gesticulation. The preceding speakers, he said, had given them noble theories. He, himself, was merely a plain man. It was his humble business to tell them how those theories were to be acted on. "And yet," he exclaimed, "I — you all of you know that — have been teaching these theories myself — well, I won't say to how many thousands, or to how many hundreds of thousands, any time during the past six years. Why, I addressed a mass meeting, only a week ago — a meeting of men not one of whom had had a job for a twelvemonth; and I told them that very thing that Mrs. Norham — all honour to her for it — has just now been a-telling you. I told them plain and straight that it was they, and such as they, that made all the country's wealth, and paid the country's taxes, and supported the army and the police by which the

blood-suckers kept them in subjection. And I told them that those that pay the taxes should have the spending of the taxes; and that we'd have a new army, and that that army should be themselves." This, he said, brought him to what he most particularly wanted to impress upon them. The previous thinkers had told them that they were to do away with war. That was true: but only of war in the vulgar sense — of war waged by one country against another. "I'm here to tell you," he said, "that in helping to abolish war of this kind — or rather, I should say, as the first means towards abolishing it — for I'm not one of them as are in favour of any waiting — we must start a war of another kind — a kind that is still more serious. Do you know what I mean?" exclaimed Mr. Tibbits, inviting the attention of his audience with an impressive, though somewhat dirty, finger. "I reckon some of you do; but if you don't, I'll tell you. It's the war of the honest men against the thieves. You know who the thieves are. Not the poor fellows in the street. Oh, no, it's not them, who are run in by the policemen for taking the bread their own hands have kneaded. Look here, now. When a working-man makes an invention — an invention, mind you, that not one of the slave-drivers has the brains to make — they all of them conspire, under the stress of cut-throat competition, to keep from him the means of making his invention useful to the community. They thieve his opportunity from him. These are the thieves I speak of. It's war against them, I mean." Here he was encouraged by the sound of a few claps. "It's war against privilege," he continued. Here the clapping grew louder. "It's war against sin and ignorance." The clapping became more perfunctory. "It is," shouted Mr. Tibbits, rising to the great occasion, "it is, in a word, war against capitalism — it is a war of class against class."

At these words the applause became an uproar, emanating, indeed, from a minority of the audience only, but a minority so finely enthusiastic that, instead of clapping his hands, one member of it, a socialistic stripling, thrust them into his mouth and emitted an inspiriting whistle.

Mrs. Norham frowned, and touched Mr. Bousefield's arm. "This will never do," she whispered. "We are fast becoming a bear-garden." Mr. Bousefield rose, exclaiming, "Order, if you please! Order! We shall never govern the world, if we can't govern ourselves." Quiet was restored, and Mr. Tibbits proceeded with his speech, of which the upshot was apparently this, that by whatever more practical means the war against Capital might be waged, he and other lecturers were prepared in Startfield Hall to wage it by demonstrating that the capitalist was a superfluity — that he acquired his capital simply by being exceptionally foolish and idle, which gave him an unfair advantage in the cut-throat struggle of life; and that any worker who was contented, under the Capitalist system, however good his wages, was a traitor to his class, and Mr. Tibbits was not ashamed to say it.

A crusade having thus been declared against war and capital, other speakers followed, each shadowing forth the part he was prepared to play in the new progressive movement. Each was to attack, by his lectures, directly or indirectly, some transitory abuse which has always existed hitherto, or advocate some remedy which has never existed yet; and though the various speakers agreed in little else, there was an important point as to which they were all unanimous — each was convinced that his own remedy must necessarily precede all others, and that until it was applied none of the others could be possible. An economist was prepared to advocate the abolition of all foreign trade; an historian was going to lecture on the tactics of forcible revolution; and the little gipsy-like man in lavender gloves, from Oxford, was to handle the history of marriage, and to show that no social advance was possible unless it started with the abolition of the monogamous family. Nothing indeed was lacking in the programme thus put forward, except the non-controversial culture indicated by Mrs. Norham.

But the great sensation of the evening was yet to come. Whilst this oratory was in progress, Mr. Bousefield had accomplished a stroke of diplomacy. He had perceived that Mrs. Dickson, as speaker succeeded speaker, was gradually acquir-

ing the fixed expression of a Medusa: and fearing that at any moment she might get up and leave the platform, he hit on the ingenious device of going to her and saying in a whisper that, as it had been impossible to arrange for her to speak first, they had done the next best thing, and arranged for her to speak last — "so that your wholesome words," said Mr. Bousefield, "will be in the women's ears when they go." The effect of this suggestion was magical. Mrs. Dickson's face shone out again; and so happily absorbed did she become in studying her own notes, that when she heard herself described by the chairman as being the living woman who had made the cause of woman most exclusively her own, she was unaware that the speaker who had just sat down was the little man in lavender gloves, by whom marriage and the family were to be annihilated. Her fluffy hair and her silks, together with an appealing curtsey, secured for her a reception which, as she said herself, "warmed her heart"; and the men amongst the audience were conscious of an agreeable curiosity, when Mrs. Dickson announced that she wished to speak specially to the women, adding, "I am sure that in a sacred place like this there are no men who will be shamed by anything I have to tell you." She then laid it down that every reform would be utterly useless unless preceded by a complete reformation of the husband. "And how are you to reform him?" she asked. "By first knowing — horrible though the knowledge may be — those details of his life he hides from you. Oh, wives of England, do you know what your husbands are? Daughters of England, have you any exact ideas of what your fathers were before they married your mothers — ay, and after? You have not — you cannot have; but it is your duty to learn. Oh, women and girls, let me give you some outlines of those truths which, if you will let me, I will teach you more fully by and by. Here are a few statistics, taken from proceedings in the Divorce Court, from the private memoranda of Vigilance Societies, and from other sources more confidential still. Listen," she said: "the following refers to a well-known garrison town. Out of one hundred and twelve married men — gentlemen, if you please — gentlemen, only fifteen — "

The announcement which followed these words produced that breathless silence which, on some occasions, is more flattering than all applause. In hurried accents Mrs. Dickson proceeded, the silence, as she did so, growing more and more profound.

Mr. Bousefield's sympathising attention gave way to puzzled anxiety; he made noises in his throat; he began to shuffle in his chair; when suddenly there arose a slight disturbance amongst the audience, and a grey-haired man, with a pair of smoked spectacles, said something which indicated a wish to address the Chairman.

Mrs. Dickson paused. Mr. Bousefield, despite the irregularity of this appeal, caught at it as a drowning man catches at the proverbial straw. "Yes," he said, "one moment; will you kindly speak up, please?"

"Mr. Chairman," said the man, with all the cares of a family in his voice, "my sight's sadly defective, and I don't know who the young gentleman is who's speaking, but I happen to have brought here my wife and two daughters, and I would ask you — I would demand of you, sir — that you remind the young gentleman in question that ladies are present, and that — that — I say it as a family man, sir, that the ladies should withdraw, or that the young gentleman should be silent."

Solemn as the assembly was, some of the less noble members of it still had their nature tainted with a faint sense of humour, and the lecture-room of Startfield Hall was profaned by a slight tittering. Mrs. Delia Dickson underwent a new experience. For the first time in her life she was conscious of what is called confusion, and she would hardly have known in what manner to comport herself if Mr. Bousefield had not come to her rescue.

"I think," he said, "and it is doubtless my own fault as chairman, that this devoted and gifted lady has not been sufficiently informed of the precise scope of our meeting. A detailed treatment of any subject is not part of to-night's programme. I agree, therefore, with the gentleman who has just appealed to me that the great work to which this noble lady has devoted herself is of too delicate and important a

kind to be dealt with advantageously now; but we will do our best to secure for her special opportunities hereafter of appealing to those who specially need her assistance, and I will ask you, meanwhile, to pass a vote of thanks to Mrs. Dickson for showing us to-night on what a devoted leader we may rely in extinguishing those evils which for too long — indeed, ever since marriage was instituted — have been allowed to interfere with the felicity which that institution naturally produces. Those in favour of the motion please hold up your hands. Carried unanimously. And now," Mr. Bousefield proceeded, "as I said before, if any of you have suggestions to make with regard to the subjects of the lectures — " But Mrs. Norham arrested him. "If all these people," said this spirit of Democracy in a whisper to him, "are to be giving us their crude advice, and expecting us seriously to consider it, our whole arrangements will again be thrown into the melting-pot. Besides, do you see the time?" Mr. Bousefield glanced at the clock, and then answered her with a nod. "I have," he said, turning again to the audience, "been just reminded that the hour is somewhat advanced. I fear, accordingly, that any general tendering of suggestions will not be practicable now; I will, therefore, confine what I have said to such of you as may feel inclined to offer us, or to secure for us from friends, any contributions to our funds. I feel that any one who is inclined to assist us in this way should, as a matter of business, have a short, but clear, answer with regard to any points as to which he desires to be satisfied."

The mention of funds was productive of a leaden silence, and it seemed as if the proceedings would come to an ignominious and premature conclusion, when a figure rose at the far end of the platform, and begged to be heard as a possible subscriber to the Hall. The agreeable modulation of his voice at once drew every eye on him. He was Mr. Bousefield's stranger.

"Mr. Chairman," he began, "I am not perhaps wholly in agreement with all the objects of your Institution, as they have been set forth to-night. But I should be willing to subscribe to it if, in addition to the purposes just specified, you

would allow it to be used for certain others, which, though different from these, are not opposed to them. I, like you, am anxious to help the poor by teaching them; but whereas you lay great stress, I suppose, on teaching them their natural rights, I should like to provide them with means for teaching them their legal rights; and whereas you lay stress on teaching the men political economy, I should like to teach their wives and daughters home economy — not the fine arts, but the arts of the housewife, the domestic physician, and, if I may venture to say so, of the domestic cook. In other words, I would suggest that instruction should be here provided, by competent teachers, in medicine, household management, and cookery; and, further, that a solicitor should attend here, at stated hours, who would give advice, free of charge, to the poor, who, as lodgers, tenants, or otherwise, might happen to be in legal difficulties."

The previous speakers turned towards the stranger with a scowl. Mr. Poulton was whispering to Mrs. Norham, "This is simply farcical;" and Mrs. Norham was answering, "Do you know who this man is?" when a voice from the platform itself — a voice from the neighbourhood of the chairman — exclaimed: "I'm with him for one. Here's a man who just talks sense. That's what they need, poor bodies; they need to be taught that." The stranger recognised the Caledonian accents of Mrs. Bousefield, who, inspirited by her own courage, now began clapping enthusiastically; and, to the horror of Mr. Poulton and his allies, some traitors to the new movement in various parts of the lecture room joined in the dastardly acclamation. "This is merely a capitalist's dodge," growled Mr. Tibbits to his clenched fists; then, unable to control his exalted feelings, "We want," he exclaimed, "to make the poor not contented, but discontented." "Startfield Hall," cried the swarthy little man from Oxford, in a high tinkling voice, "was not meant for a cookery school." The defiant socialistic stripling shouted out, "Sit down, sir." "I will not," said the stranger, as soon as the storm had spent itself, "tax your patience longer. The opposition, as well as the sympathy," — he here turned towards Mrs. Bousefield, —

"which my proposals have excited, shows that I have described them sufficiently." "Who's to pay?" shouted out several voices. "I have only to add," said the stranger, ignoring the interruption, "that if your committee see their way to carrying these proposals into effect, I will give, to start the experiment, fifteen hundred pounds."

Mrs. Norham's disapproval of the rich had so little narrowness in it, that she again looked at the stranger with an increasingly earnest curiosity, and from several quarters came a murmur of respectful and surprised applause. But Mr. Poulton, who was irritated beyond measure, jumped up and, with a fine gesture of authority, said, "With the chairman's leave, I must ask if the speaker is serious. He is unknown, I think, to all of us; and before the committee can consent to devote their time to considering how far this startling programme is practicable, is he prepared to give us any tangible guarantee that the support he promises us will be actually forthcoming if required?" "Will he put down the money on the chairman's table now?" tittered the swarthy little man from Oxford into the collar of his pilot jacket. "This gentleman," said the stranger, speaking for the first time sharply, "asks me if I will deposit at this moment the sum of which I have spoken. His suspicions do honour to him as an astute man of the world." A slight laugh was raised amongst the audience by this compliment, to which the swarthy little man responded with a goblin frown. "I hope," the stranger continued, "to set his suspicions at rest. If your chairman, who has hospitably entertained me to-night at dinner, will permit me to return with him to his house, I will give him a letter to my solicitors, who will place the money in his hands, to be held by him whilst your governing body is considering whether it can be used for the purposes I have indicated."

This announcement produced a considerable sensation. The question, "Who is he?" was audible in several parts of the hall; and Mr. Bousefield wound up the proceedings by handsomely thanking Mr. Brandon for his magnificent offer, whether or no they might find themselves able to profit by it.

"I confess, my dear sir," he said, a quarter of an hour later,

when he was leaning against his own chimney-piece, with the stranger facing him, "I confess that this offer of yours completely took away my breath. It is, of course," Mr. Bousefield continued, slightly pursing up his mouth and frowning, "it is, of course, — this scheme of yours, — an entirely new departure. As Mrs. Norham said to me on the way back, it is a little like proposing, when some one has built a church, to turn the vestry into a steam laundry."

"Well," said the stranger, "if you will think the matter over, I will, with your permission, write the letter to my solicitors. You probably know the firm. They are in Bedford Row, close by; and the sum I spoke of shall be handed over to you by them any time during the next six months, if within that period your committee find themselves able to use it for the purposes I have specified."

"My dear sir," said Mr. Bousefield, "whatever our decision may be, we are none the less obliged to you for your great, your extraordinary generosity. We will consider the matter as you suggest — certainly we will — certainly. I should tell you, however, that in coming to a decision there will probably be some delay — a delay caused by the fact that I am about, for a short time only, to allow myself an indulgence which I could hardly have reconciled with my conscience if my good wife and my doctor had not, rightly or wrongly, determined that my health required it. We are going abroad — to the south — not to one of your fashionable centres, but to a little seaside village in Provence, where house room is to be had cheap. Mrs. Norham, who has been frightfully overtaxing her strength — Mrs. Norham never spares herself — will join us and share our expenses; and as we have secured, for a mere nominal rent, three villas about as big as dolls' houses standing in the same garden, we propose to take in, during the six weeks of our tenancy, a few tired-out brain-workers, on low terms, as paying guests. It is possible, therefore, that I may be unable to settle anything till Easter; but the moment I have anything to tell you, I will communicate with you or your solicitors, and naturally nothing shall be done unless you or they are satisfied."

"I," said the stranger, "may be going abroad also. This winter, it seems, there is a general exodus."

"There generally is," said Mr. Bousefield, "of the rich and idle."

"My solicitors," said the stranger, "would always forward my letters to me. I am sorry not to be a little more communicative about myself, but my slight connection as a landlord with this locality makes me wish, for the present, to remain more or less in the background. And now, thanking you for your kindness, I must say good-bye and go."

He had hardly finished speaking, when a voice was heard in the doorway, and Mrs. Norham inserted her face and her aureole, saying, with a valedictory nod, that she must be going also.

"Let me escort you," exclaimed Mr. Bousefield. But he had hardly reached the door when he received an unwelcome check. "Ye mustn't, ye just mustn't, Mr. Prouse Bousefield, ye mustn't. Mrs. Norham, don't let him." The appeal was from Mrs. Bousefield. "When he spoke to-night, there was a little cold and a snuffle in his voice, and I knew that his uvula was getting relaxed again. Harry shall go with Mrs. Norham, unless she would be liking a cab."

"May I be allowed," said the stranger, "to see Mrs. Norham to her door?"

Mr. Bousefield was about to protest that Mr. Brandon should not be troubled, when the ground was cut from under him, in an unexpected and mortifying manner, by Mrs. Norham herself, who accepted the offer eagerly; and the stranger and she were presently making their way together through the misty silence of the streets, whilst Mr. Bousefield, his feet in slippers, was having his equanimity restored by some toddy and a plate of shortbread.

Ever since the stranger had mentioned the amount of his proposed donation, a conviction had been growing in Mrs. Norham's mind that he was, at all events, worthy of the salutary honour of being attacked by her; and she longed to cement her acquaintance by showing him his inferiority to herself; but now that she had secured a convenient opportu-

nity for doing so, she was conscious of a difficulty in beginning her intended operation. They had, indeed, very nearly reached her house before she unmasked her batteries, and said, with abrupt severity, "If you want to spend money on any teaching of the poor which is not a direct inculcation of intellectual views, you would do far better in helping a certain number of them — through our agency — to travel. I am going, I hope, without seeming to patronise them, to get a few of them to the south for a few weeks this winter — not so much for their health's sake, as to get them out of a contented groove — out of their narrowness."

"I was," the stranger answered, as if he were talking to himself, "speaking about travel the other day, to my friend the American Ambassador; and he said to me this — I have often thought of it since — 'The Devil never found a truer note to his voice than the railway whistle.' I agree with him, Mrs. Norham. Happiness requires limitations — the very thing that you call narrowness — just as wine requires a glass to hold it. I would venture also to give utterance to another benighted sentiment. Until culture makes the higher classes happy, you can no more expect it to bring happiness to the lower, than a man can expect, if all his best claret is corked, to make it a sound wine by distributing it amongst his poor relations. You may possess a receipt for personal happiness, possibly. I, for my part, if I ever had it, have lost it."

The stranger's chance mention of the American Ambassador had left Mrs. Norham more convinced than ever that he was worth either cultivating or humiliating. She was therefore annoyed to find that she was already at her own door, having been lectured by her companion rather than having lectured him. She was half inclined to ask him in for a little, but her knowledge of the world was, she felt, too considerable to allow her to take a step so open to misconstruction; she was accordingly obliged to let him go, with the advantage of the last word; and she entered her dwelling not in the best of tempers.

CHAPTER V

Lady Scarva, to whose impending party Lady Tregothran had alluded, was, in her own way, as active on behalf of the Liberals as Lady Tregothran and Mrs. Tilney, in their ways, were on behalf of the Tories; and she was serving the cause of progress, and was qualifying her husband for a peerage, by demonstrating how false is the idea that the extremest democratic principles can possibly conflict with the aspirations of private life. Whilst proclaiming, as a politician, the rights and the supremacy of the many, it is impossible to imagine anybody in private life more fearless and consistent in admitting the social supremacy of the few. She thus showed how reasonable were her party's principles in reality by her own freedom from any of their apparent consequences; and she showed at the same time the depth of her own belief in them by invariably losing her temper if anybody questioned her sincerity. She would, indeed, though devoted to her husband and her husband's fortunes, have borne with a better grace that her virtue should be doubted than her Radicalism; whilst she was pleased, rather than otherwise, when her intimate women friends twitted her in private with the excesses of her social fastidiousness. "My dears," she would say, "that shows how little you know about it. I am obliged to earn for my house a reputation by my small parties in order to give pleasure to those whom I only ask to my large ones."

Such was Lady Scarva, a woman who looked so young that, instead of resenting or denying her forty years, she could afford to regard them as a mere foil to her piquancy. The daughter of a Tory squire, once a member of Parliament, and well known as a pillar of the old-fashioned landed interest, she now shone as the wife of an illustrious distiller of whisky. She

was slight, small, and possessed of a charming manner. Her house, with three exceptions, was the largest in all Park Lane, and those who knew the sums which Sir John Scarva, her husband, made each year out of his two Irish distilleries were only surprised that it was not a great deal larger.

Her party to-night was one of those comprehensive gatherings at which the various groups of Parliamentary reformers were united by a common participation in the privileges which they professed themselves anxious to destroy, and at which she was accustomed to prove by the pressure of her welcoming hands how deeply she valued those with whom this was her only intercourse. Lady Scarva's guests, however, were by no means all Liberals. There were, on the contrary, few political hostesses whose political parties were enlivened by so many fashionable Tories; and she was eminently successful to-night in making use of these distinguished opponents as the unconscious means of attracting to her the less distinguished of her allies.

Still, to those who are conversant with the varieties of London entertainments, the political party, though it may wear the trappings of fashion, always has a character of its own, which mere fashion can neither impart nor neutralise. This character is apparent on the staircase or even at the cloakroom door. There is a movement and an energy which in other parties is absent. Amongst figures familiar to half the candles in London, who deposit their coats or cloaks and mount to the upper regions almost as placidly as if they were going to bed, there are others whose faces are flushed and whose eyes are wide with vitality, and who give to the scene the animation, and, indeed, something of the inconvenience, of a railway station on a Bank Holiday. Round-faced men, on whose cheeks the happy dews of excitement are fresh and red in the light of a social sunrise, look for their wives and daughters as if they were lost dressing-bags, or exchange with friends knowing glances of recognition, charged with a patronising surprise at meeting them under such conditions. Wives give purpose to the vagueness of their husbands' movements, whilst severe Jacobins of sixty, mellowed by three years of Parliament, who,

next to the destruction of aristocratic manners, have come to the conclusion that the best thing is to annex them, greet each other with the knowingness of mature men of the world. Such was the scene in Lady Scarva's hall to-night from a quarter before, until half-past, eleven, as her guests got rid of their cloaks at the foot of her double staircase.

"Well," said a tall doctrinaire, lean with revolutionary thinking, to a little spectacled man with the figure of a squat plum-pudding, "well, Jackson, and what mischief have you been up to?"

"Go along," said the other, feigning an attack on the questioner's ribs; "we don't want any of your private detectives here. I say, old fellow — look — do you see the Marchioness? Have you heard the latest story they are telling about *her?*"

"I've heard," said the other, "the story they're telling about *him*. There he is. My dear fellow, don't you know him? Tristram Lacy, I mean, who was once Conservative whip. Oh, my boy, I was forgetting. You weren't in the House till this year. You wouldn't know him, of course. Well, they say he's been offered — but hush, hush, he is close to us. Wait a moment, and I'll tell you when he's gone by."

The subject of this conversation had only just arrived, and though many of the guests were waiting to go upstairs, a considerable number were already coming down to supper. The faces of most of them were apparently as unfamiliar to *him* as his had just been asserted to be to the general public; but those who did greet him all evinced a pleasure which seemed quite as much due to the sense of being seen talking to him as to any words or ideas that could have possibly passed between them. As for him, though his face lit up when he spoke, it suggested a pond reflecting a clouded sky, which sparkled only if something disturbed its surface; and yet, when he made his way slowly up the crowded staircase, a gleam of subdued amusement would often float in his eyes as he studied the figures and forms which pushed and perspired on each side of him; or listened to those fragmentary sounds by which alone, at a crowded party, human intercourse is dis-

tinguished from human contact. Those who maintain that only a few exceptional Englishmen possess that gift of society which is ascribed generally to the French, would have found that even the dullest of Lady Scarva's guests were able to-night to vie with the most brilliant and original, and, indeed, that the conversation of both consisted of the same observations. "How are you?" "What a dismal fog." "Considering the fog, I thought there would have been fewer people." Whilst as for Lady Scarva, who stood in her white doorway with a smile as varying as the lights on her heliotrope silk dress, she was a living refutation of another of those opinions which are expressed to the disadvantage of English, and, indeed, of all society. She showed that social charm of the most successful kind is not, for a good woman, incompatible with truthfulness; for in welcoming those of her guests whom she was now most anxious to conciliate, she never wandered from truth of the most literal kind, and she said with a smile for each, "It's an age since I saw you last." Indeed, such was the magic of these words, that the tall revolutionary doctrinaire, whom she actually had seen at a meeting that afternoon, felt when, by accident, she uttered them to him also, that he had inspired her with a romantic attachment, and began, as he held her hand, to wonder whether Robespierre would have neglected such a *bonne fortune*. Mr. Tristram Lacy appearing at this juncture, she merely kissed to him the hand that was disengaged, and with a little nod told him to pass on. This was easier said than done; for a stream of emerging guests was impeding the movements of those who were about to enter. Tristram Lacy, however, was presently in the first drawing-room, where he slipped unobserved into a corner near the door, and contented himself with watching the throng that was moving past him.

Before very long his interest was perceptibly roused by a burst of half-boyish laughter proceeding from some one near him — the kind of laughter that is usually the drapery of some humorous indecorum; and he saw, with a slight start, that it emanated from a curly-headed individual, singularly boyish in aspect, whose face was twitching with a kind of confiden-

tial mischief, and who with great volubility was talking to some lady, whom Lacy judged from a back view of her to be elderly. He judged also that the mood in which she listened to the person addressing her was one of condescending and perhaps of amused tolerance, and that she was, in particular, at once flattered and annoyed at his refusal to believe her to be otherwise than in perfect health.

"Dear Lady Dovedale," he was saying to her, "I'm really not trying to flatter you. You must be as strong as ever or you could never have got in here. I've not the least doubt," he went on, with an impish twinkle in his eye, "I've not the least doubt that as soon as you're out at Cannes, you'll find yourself the life of the whole hotel *salon*."

Lacy saw indignation in the jerk of the lady's head, and he heard her reply in a crushing and contemptuous voice, "Hotel *salon*, Mr. Brancepeth! What on earth do you mean? What do you suppose I should be doing in an hotel *salon?* I'm going to spend the winter with the Helbecksteins at their new villa — the villa which was Prince Ferdinand's." Having said this, the lady, with a peculiar strutting gait, pushed herself into the throng, and escaped any further irreverences.

The laughing young man had his eyes on her disappearing back, when he was, as Lacy saw, addressed by another matron, who had just been announced outside as Mrs. Montagu Beauclerck — a tall personage, with a masculine and determined presence, who went through any crowd like a boat through a bed of bulrushes. "Well, Mr. Brancepeth," she said to him, "and what may you have been doing with yourself lately? And where did you steal that magnificent orchid in your button-hole?"

"Oh," said the laughing young man, whose face saddened suddenly, "I've been all this afternoon by the bedside of a poor dear old frend of mine who's awfully down on his luck, and who's ill, *so* ill, into the bargain."

Mrs. Montagu Beauclerck did not seem much impressed. "So," she said, "having embodied charity in your own person during the day, you have been talking to it to-night as embodied in the person of Lady Dovedale."

"I don't know," the young man retorted, his face becoming all animation again, "if Lady Dovedale is the embodiment of charity; but I do know she is going to be the recipient of it. All this winter abroad she is going to live on the Helbecksteins. Isn't it odd to think what ladies and gentlemen are coming to?"

"Humph," grunted Mrs. Montagu Beauclerck. "Poor dear old Dovedale himself is a gentleman, every inch of him — that is to say, what's left of him. But Lady Dovedale — after all, who was she?"

"That's the only secret," said Mr. Brancepeth, "that Lady Dovedale can keep. I always roar at the airs which that grand lady gives herself."

"Oh," replied Mrs. Montagu Beauclerck, with an inevitable impulse to contradict. "I find her always very civil and pleasant."

"Yes, to your face," said Mr. Brancepeth; "but get her behind your back, and I've no doubt she'll say you're the vulgarest woman in London."

"The devil she will!" exclaimed Mrs. Montagu Beauclerck.

"But what does it matter?" said Mr. Brancepeth, soothingly. "She's civil to you to your face because she wants to be intimate with you, and she abuses you behind your back merely to show she is so. What flattery can be more sincere than that? I say, Mrs. Beauclerck, come down and have supper. It must be twenty minutes, at least, since you finished dinner, and I'll tell you something which I could not possibly breathe unless we were sitting together at a nice little round table where I could whisper it."

"Well," said Mrs. Montagu Beauclerck, "come. Everybody seems to be going down. I think on the whole I had better go first and make a way for you."

Lacy's eyes followed the two as they disappeared, and then, when he began once more looking about him, he realised that the whole assembly was undergoing a change. The rooms, of which there were several, were becoming much less crowded; there was a magical disappearance of the people he did not know, and groups were left which, for the most part, were

composed of people whom he did. This subtle change was not wholly fortuitous. It nearly always took place at Lady Scarva's political parties, and was produced, as she told her intimates, by the earliness and the excellence of her supper, which drew her official contingent downstairs at half-past eleven, and was singularly efficacious in preventing their coming up again.

Lacy instinctively came forward a little out of his corner; but he was still looking about him with an absent and uninterested air, when he felt on his arm the light touch of a fan, and turning round he heard a lady saying to him, "Well, Mr. Lacy, you're not often in these scenes of gaiety. This is your first appearance since the death of Mr. Octavius Brandon."

The speaker was a woman with handsome sparkling eyes, full of intelligent sympathy, and a certain mundane determination. If her eldest daughter had not been already out, she might, at a first glance, have passed for no more than thirty. She, too, like Lady Scarva, had a husband in Parliament; and she, like Lady Scarva, was also engaged in pushing him. She was not so rich as her hostess, but she was, on the other hand, incalculably cleverer; for whilst Lady Scarva could sympathise and agree with the tenets of those she patronised, her rival, Mrs. Tilney, for this was none other than she, could remember and even frequently understand them.

"Come," she said, "sit down here, and let us have a talk together. You know my girl, I think? Norah, don't go away. Stay where you are, and presently we'll all go down together. Well, Mr. Lacy, and what have you been doing, tell me?"

"For the last ten minutes," he said, "I've been studying human nature in a corner. I've been studying Lady Dovedale. I heard her informing a friend that she is going to spend the winter with that new social star, Mrs. Helbeckstein, whom I have never had the honour of seeing. I only know of her existence because some of the heavenly bodies whom I do see are visibly deflected from their usual orbits by her neighbourhood."

"*I* know her," said Mrs. Tilney, with a slight grimace.

"Tell me, do you know what's become of Lady Dovedale's beautiful daughter? I mean Lady Madeleine Seaton. Since that marriage of hers, into which her mother forced her, one has hardly seen or heard of her. But I thought, a day or two ago, I had a glimpse of her in Piccadilly."

"I think," said Lacy, "I met her once when she was a girl."

"She always," said Mrs. Tilney, "interested me. What was the name of that man who was half a Russian — who treated her so badly, who had such a desperate flirtation with her, and who all the while had a wife locked up in a madhouse — a big man, with long, flowing moustaches? Her mother married her to get her away from him. Perhaps she did right, though Mr. Seaton was deadly dull. I suppose it was to escape from his dulness that she went through the excitement of turning a Roman Catholic. She's a widow now, I believe. What beautiful eyes she had! Poor Madeleine, I hope she's a good jointure. Marriage, Mr. Lacy, though you haven't found that out yet, is a very serious thing."

"You, at all events," replied Lacy, "say so in a very serious tone."

"Well," said Mrs. Tilney, "with a girl of one's own coming out, one thinks so, without being a match-maker. Of course my great, my first wish for Norah is that she should marry a man she likes. Money *is* an advantage, and position *is* an advantage — but merely because, in many ways, it makes things so much easier; and I shall be quite happy — more than happy, I'm sure — if she can only find some good man who'll be kind to her. However, I'm not going to give you a lecture on marriage. I want you to give me some more of your own biography."

"Well," said the other, laughing, "here is another chapter of it. Before I began to study human nature here, I was studying it in a place which I'm certain you'd never guess. Did you ever hear of an institution called Startfield Hall?"

"Hear of it," exclaimed Mrs. Tilney; "I've been pestered about nothing else. There's that Mrs. Norham, who has been begging me to come on their committee; and who tells a friend of hers that she's anxious to make my acquaintance. I think

that next week I shall have to ask her to luncheon. But how in the world did *you* manage to get there?"

"Oh," he said, "I was asked to go, and I went; and what is more, I sat by Mrs. Norham at dinner."

"You must tell me more in a moment. This really is very interesting," said Mrs. Tilney, as her attention suddenly strayed, and became fixed on a man with dark glittering eyes and curiously twisted moustaches, who was slowly strolling towards her. There was in his movements a certain repressed swagger which suggested that his manners had been formed not in the most reputable society, and that he submitted for the moment only to the insipid restraints of decency. "Lord Crowborough," exclaimed Mrs. Tilney, with the possessive air of a friend, "will you be very kind? Take Norah, do, and get her some lemonade. She's dying of thirst, poor girl. I shall be here when you come back." The gentleman addressed undertook the task imposed on him with a creditable assumption of pleasure, and as he turned to the young lady, a stud of memorable size blazed at her from his shirt front. Mrs. Tilney devoted herself again to her companion. "Yes," she resumed, "Mrs. Norham — and where on earth did you sit by her? Oh, at Mr. Bousefield's was it? I know him by name, too. He's a sort of Mæcenas amongst the earnest persons of Bloomsbury. But you haven't told me what took you into such brilliant company."

"Well," said Mr. Lacy, "the real reason that took me was the fact of my being owner of some property near this new hall."

"To be sure," cried Mrs. Tilney, putting her hand in his arm. "It is part of what was left you by Mr. Octavius Brandon. By the way, you have now become Brandon Lacy, haven't you? I suppose," she went on confidentially, "it is really something very large. I hope you don't think me terribly indiscreet for asking, because I want to ask you something more indiscreet still."

"Let us," he said, "have the larger indiscretion first."

"Is it true, then," she asked, "that you've been offered a certain post and refused it?"

"Must I tell State secrets to Lady Scarva also?" Mr. Lacy whispered, as their hostess came towards them.

"My dear Carlotta," said Lady Scarva, "at last I can have a word with you. So here you are, holding a little court as usual. I've a young man somewhere who wants to be introduced to Norah. He's Patrick Scarva, our nephew — my dear, one of the partners."

This last piece of information was given in a mock whisper. "Norah," said Mrs. Tilney, "will be here again in a moment. She's gone downstairs with Lord Crowborough to get an ice or something."

At the mention of Lord Crowborough's name Lady Scarva pursed her mouth up.

"My dear," said Mrs. Tilney, "you needn't be doing that at me. I know Lord Crowborough was — well, what we all know he was. There was a time, indeed, when I wouldn't have him inside my own door. But he's a good fellow at heart."

"Is he?" said some one, drily, who had come up with Lady Scarva, a tall man with a slightly cynical face, worn with the weather of many a London season.

"Yes," said Mrs. Tilney, stoutly, "and I won't have him abused. You've no notion how much he's improved since the sad, the terrible death of his elder brother."

"I admit," said the tall man, "that a death of that kind is a species of chastening by which most second sons are improved."

"Well," said Mrs. Tilney, quickly, "if we are to go on discussing him, we had better ask him to assist at his own execution; for there's Norah — I can see her dress in that doorway — and, unless we stop, he will hear every word we say of him. They are coming now. I can see Norah move."

Whilst she was speaking the young lady advanced, and her attendant cavalier became visible also. Mrs. Tilney's fears, however, proved to have been happily groundless, for the cavalier was not Lord Crowborough, but a musical canon of St. Paul's, who had recently sung himself into a cure of Belgravian souls. If Mrs. Tilney had not been capable of man-

aging the expression of her face almost as well as she managed women's committees, the chances are that she might have looked a trifle foolish. She possessed, however, the happy, but unconscious, art of always appearing to be mistress of the situation; and she found that the reality generally followed the appearance. "Lord Crowborough," said the girl, "was obliged to go on somewhere." The tall man looked at Lacy, as if he knew well enough what the kind of somewhere was. As for Mrs. Tilney, she looked maternally at her daughter, and, taking her hand, said, "I think I know somebody who's been out for three nights running, and would like to go somewhere else also. My dear Juliet," she continued, rising and addressing herself to Lady Scarva, "good-night, my dear, I must take this young person home. Well, Mr. Lacy," she said, as she drew him aside for a moment, "you've not even answered the most indiscreet of my questions." "Look," he said, as she began to move away from him, "look, if you remember to do so, in the papers this day week. You will see the answer there, or something from which you will be able to infer it."

As he dropped behind her, the tall man touched his arm, and murmured, "Look here, Lacy, do you find this party a bore? If you do, I can make you change your opinion."

"I wish you would," was the answer.

"Well," said the tall man, "everything in life is comparative; and if you care for this ticket, it will admit you to another entertainment which will bore you so much more that you will look back on this as intoxicating. Here, use it or not; and if you don't use it this evening, it is good for another time. For my sins I am one of the directors. Good night. I have something to say to Scarva."

Lacy thrust a limp and unsealed envelope into his pocket without having looked at it, and went down listlessly to the cloak-room. "Coming out, coming out," said the sharp voices of the servants. "Cab or carriage, my lord?" said the insinuating voice of the linkman; but Lacy, deaf to his blandishments, went into the fog on foot. He presently stopped short under a gas-lamp, and extracted the mysterious envelope. By straining his eyes, he made out that the con-

tents consisted of a ticket for a private box at a well-known place of entertainment, which was that night to be the scene of a masked ball; or, as it was called, "a carnival." He thrust the ticket and its envelope back again into his pocket. "I will," he said, "take his word for it, that this would be even duller than Lady Scarva's."

CHAPTER VI

In the quiet region at the back of Cavendish Square is a street of houses monumental in their solidity and spaciousness, whose outer aspect has suffered no change whatever since the date of their erection, sometime in the eighteenth century. They are houses which, if they had been situated a little nearer to Piccadilly, would have ended inevitably as the quarters of important clubs. One of the most imposing of them had, for something like thirty years, worn an air even gloomier and more antique than its neighbours. All its windows, except those on the ground floor, had displayed the persistent blankness of down-drawn and grimy blinds; whilst the soft darkness which is born of the London winters, and is not unlike the bloom on some spectral grape, had accumulated unchecked on the railings and the deeply recessed door. It was to this door, which looked as if it had never been opened for a generation, that Tristram Brandon Lacy, having made his way through the fog, at last applied his latch-key. Within was a bare pale vestibule, whose woodwork was the colour of gingerbread, its sole furniture being a dilapidated porter's chair, whilst beyond was a hall floored with black and white squares of marble, and now dimly illuminated by a ponderous hanging lamp, which showed where a bare stone staircase mounted into echoing shadow.

From this desolate hall Lacy passed into a long room with a fire in it, and near the fire, on a tray, were some decanters and a bottle of soda water, their brightness alone suggesting the life and habits of to-day. Everything else seemed eloquent of times and tastes gone by — the high book-cases with their glimmer of brass lattice-work, the busts of Pitt and Canning, the mahogany desks and tables, and the faded Axminster

carpet, with a crest and medallion in the middle of it. Close to the tray a number of letters were lying. He took them up, glanced at them, and passed into the room adjoining. This also had been fitted up as a library, its shelves being filled with rows of old Parliamentary Reports; but it had now been converted into a bedroom by the introduction of the necessary furniture, and had a general air of being bivouacked rather than lived in. In one corner, against the book-shelves, was a pile of battered portmanteaus, and parallel to the bed was a wall of japanned deed-boxes, each of which, in white letters, bore the name of Octavius Brandon.

It was, indeed, to Mr. Brandon — Lady Tregothran's "old Octavius" — that this house had belonged, and to his father and his grandfather before him. Since the death of his wife he had very rarely entered it, but for many years Lacy, his wife's nephew, had been allowed by him to occupy two rooms on the entrance floor. And now of this great house Lacy found himself to be actually the owner. He had indeed now been its owner for several months, but he had thus far signalised the fact by no alteration in the furniture, and indeed, during that time, he had occupied it only once or twice for a night or two.

Tristram Lacy, Tristram Brandon Lacy, was the only surviving representative of an ancient Cheshire family, which had once been wealthy and influential; and he, at his father's death, about three years ago, had succeeded to some thousands of acres, a beautiful and romantic park, and a mansion which was mentioned with respect in all the local guide-books. But for him these possessions were merely the shell of wealth, almost all the substance of it being eaten out by mortgages; and so well was this fact known that his acquaintances were accustomed to wonder at his even having been master of the eight or nine hundred a year required to support him as a bachelor in Parliament and polite society. His acquaintances knew, and he knew better than they, that a very slight fall in agricultural rents would rob him of even the semblance of a man of property, and transfer his home and his acres into the hands of the mortgagees. Indeed, this catastrophe would

have probably taken place already if it had not been for the sudden accession of fortune, on which he had never counted, and which had never even come within his calculations.

It was his grandfather who had been guilty of undermining the family property by his repeated successes in securing his own return for his county; and his loyalty to the Tory party being quite beyond suspicion, the Governments whom he supported had all forborne to affront him by supposing that it required to be secured by even a promise of the least reward. His son, on succeeding him, found himself so much embarrassed, that though his wife, Lady Amelia, brought him, besides her affection, the honour of being brother-in-law to Lord Runcorn, the most remarkable of our modern Prime Ministers, the unfortunate country gentleman could support the Toryism of his neighbourhood by nothing more substantial than the witness of his own poverty, which, at all events, showed this — how sincere were his convictions that Toryism must bring some great benefit to the nation, since, judged by his personal experiences, it brought nothing but ruin to the family. His wife, however, having brought him a portion of fifty thousand pounds, they continued, with the aid of her capital, rather than of the income which it yielded, to spend their lives, without any great discomfort, in the large, decaying house whose roofs they could just keep watertight. But though this procedure was naturally not calculated to improve the worldly circumstances of their only son at their death, they treated him throughout their lifetime with a liberality beyond their means; they maintained him at Eton and Oxford like the heir to a large fortune; they subsequently made him an allowance somewhat in excess of the income which he found, after their death, accruing to him from the family acres; and the vigour and versatility of his character, and his brilliant series of successes, formed the greatest pleasure, and the only excitement, of their lives.

Tristram Lacy's character had been not inaccurately described in his uncle's letter to Mrs. Tilney. He had the temperament of a poet and a philosopher, with traces of the temperament of a saint; but combined with all this were

the tastes of the fastidious man of the world, and the ambition and practical energy natural to the man of action. At Oxford, which he left early in order to join the army, he showed himself not more than moderately accurate in his scholarship, but he developed an extraordinary avidity in the acquisition of all speculative knowledge which seemed to him to have a direct bearing on life — especially the discoveries of modern science and criticism with regard to the physiological and religious history of man. In entering the army, his principal aim and wish, as he modestly told his friends, was to see active service, and prove to himself that he was not behind the generality of men in courage, endurance, and coolness, when faced by death and hardship. His wishes in this respect were, by good luck, soon fulfilled. He saw active service in Egypt; he received a wound in the hip which ever afterwards caused him to limp slightly; and his courage, endurance, and coolness sent him home with a reputation from which all the newspapers augured for him a brilliant military future. Those auguries, however, he at once proceeded to falsify by giving up a profession he seemed so manifestly qualified to adorn; and being fortunate in possessing a Prime Minister for his uncle, he was shortly transformed into one of the Prime Minister's secretaries. In this post he acquitted himself so well, owing not only to his general talents, but to his manners and to his accomplishments as a linguist, that he was selected to accompany his Chief to a certain foreign capital on the occasion of a conference of the great European Powers — a conference affecting the peace of the whole civilised world.

A dissolution of Parliament occurring a year after this event, he was, at Mr. Brandon's expense, returned for an important borough. It is true he disappointed the larger part of his constituents, because he never spoke in the House unless he had something to say; yet in the House itself he was regarded as a rising politician, and being always charming in manner, though often caustic in matter, he rose eventually to be one of the Tory whips. Meanwhile, in society he was as much flattered and courted as any young man can be whose income is counted in hundreds, and who finds it, in consequence, a

much easier thing to be dreaded by husbands than to be thoroughly esteemed by mothers. But social and political, just like the military life, at length seemed to lose their zest for him, and to lose it when his hopes looked brightest; for when that Parliament died, having reached its natural term, he steadily refused, though his triumphant return was a certainty, to stand again for his own, or indeed, for any constituency.

Greatness of any kind is rarely thrust upon anybody, and never on those who do not go half-way to meet it. Speculation, certainly, was excited as to the reasons of his strange conduct; but the world, having no clue to them, soon ceased to discuss them, and he met with no obstacle, and with very few remonstrances, when he chose for a time to bury himself in his old home in the country; nor was he, when he absented himself for a whole season from London, followed by more than a few stray cards of invitation.

But his conduct, though it puzzled the world, was in a sense consistent from the beginning; and the clue to it had been discovered by Lord Runcorn's sympathetic sagacity. On Tristram Lacy, as an eager and imaginative boy, life had opened like an illuminated theatre of poetical and spiritual romance. He had knelt before the altar, as a communicant, like a Knight of the Round Table — a knight in whose devotions mixed the dreams of the lover and the monk. The world was a wonderland stained with enchanted sunsets. Juliets leaned from balconies in the King's Road at Brighton. Passion blew to him in the winds like spices from some eastern island; it floated in the salt air vaguely between the waves and the twilight; and later on, if he lapsed from the standard of a Galahad, his lapses had all the wonder enveloping those of Tannhäuser. Religion, meanwhile, had kept shining like a lantern in a high lighthouse, to which his wildest thoughts would return, and round which they would wheel like seabirds.

Such had been his life till the time of his going to Oxford, and there he came in contact with the criticism and scientific thought of to-day, not only in the lecture-rooms, where his tutors treated St. Paul as if they did him too much honour by mentioning him in the same breath with Plato, but even in

the pulpit of his lately restored college chapel, where surpliced critics would undermine, in reverential whispers, the very foundations of the faith which it was ostensibly their profession to defend. This brief experience of the University coloured the whole of his subsequent life. His contact with these new views was at once a shock and a stimulus to him; and it roused his intellect to a state of almost angry activity, as though anxious to revenge itself on the imagination by which it had been too long dominated, till little by little everything seemed to go on which the faith, the hopes, and the interests of his early life had fed themselves; and the human race, at last denuded of all its dignity, became a petty and passing phenomenon in a universe of unending forces, of which it was itself an unimportant and seemingly unmeaning by-product.

He was, however, far from yielding himself without a struggle to this philosophy of life, which forced itself on him in a hundred different forms. At one time he betook himself to a study of the theology of the Church of Rome, and though he failed to find in it the refuge he had at first hoped for, it still retained a fascination for him; and the writings of Roman Controversialists would constantly draw him away from the allurements of novel or newspaper. He even on one occasion, to the amusement of several of his friends, forgot an appointment at a house of highly reprehensible character, in reading a German history of the growth of the early Church. Something, moreover, of what he had lost with the disturbance of his early faith was replaced by the growing vigour alike of brain and body, the excitement of contact with the world on its most brilliant side, the desire to distinguish himself in some practical way, and also the change from a boy's romantic dreaming to a man's desire for some actual woman's affection — a desire which, if tamer than that which the youthful poet dreams of, exerts on the fibres of life a far more compelling force.

But every promise of distraction, every pursuit and ambition, stimulated him only till its first rewards had been tasted by him. Then his critical intellect, like some malicious

spirit, would fasten on his pleasures or his newly awakened hopes, pick them to pieces, and exhibit them to him as a lifeless skeleton. This happened even in connection with some athletic sports at Oxford, when, being congratulated by a friend on the fine development of his muscles, he answered, "What of that? Let a man be as strong as he may be, what are a man's arms when compared with a donkey's legs?" But the chief thing in life that failed him was one whose failure was due, not only to theoretical pessimism, but to accidental circumstances also. This was the hope of finding some sympathetic and gifted woman, by whom, as a wife, something of what he had lost might be given back to him. A treasure of this kind he several times thought that he had found. One young lady was actually for several months engaged to him. But the others, under the influence of personal or family prudence, eluded him with gentle dexterity as soon as he became too serious; whilst his *fiancée* was obliged by circumstances to take more abrupt measures. Sufficient simplicity, however, still remained in his nature to prevent his perceiving at the time why his treasure always escaped him; nor did he perceive why one of a different, though allied kind, whilst theoretically more inaccessible, was as a fact less so, in a world where men who cannot marry, but yet have need of affection, meet women who have been obliged to marry, but have not as yet found it.

Matters had gone thus with him till seven or eight months ago; and then, though he did not understand them, indications of a change reached him. He was still in the country, postponing his return to London, when he was startled and perplexed by a sudden and unlooked-for influx of missives forwarded from his London quarters — cards for balls and parties, and more particularly notes entreating his company at dinner, and intimate little parties to the play. And what struck him still more was that many of his would-be entertainers, although they had always been civil to him, were now more effusive than formerly. They seemed anxious to claim him as a friend; not merely to welcome him as a guest. His surprise was increased when he once more was a Londoner,

and found that the popularity which he had earned as a public man was nothing to that which was overwhelming him when he had subsided into private life. The explanation of this mystery did not dawn on him till many weeks after that season was over, when an event to which he had never looked forward made it sufficiently clear to him. This was the death of Mr. Brandon — the widower of his father's only sister — and the startling revolution which it effected in his own position. He himself had been utterly unaware of the fact that, under any circumstances, he would be amongst Mr. Brandon's legatees; nor had he ever heard, till Mr. Brandon was actually dead, that the younger Brandon, his cousin, who had been for many years in America, had been the victim of a fever at Chicago, six months ago. But his uncle, the Prime Minister, was better informed than he. He knew of young Brandon's death, and the details of the father's will; and he consequently had been aware, in the early spring of that year, that Tristram Lacy, instead of representing a property mortgaged and depreciated, which would shortly have to be sold, had been suddenly metamorphosed into a highly desirable *parti*. Though he saw no occasion for speaking of this fact to his nephew, he, nevertheless, communicated it in confidence to a number of distinguished mothers, whose maternal hearts throbbed and expanded when they heard it, and who began to be angry with themselves when they thought how Lacy's previous poverty had blinded them for so many years to so large a proportion of his merits. Nor, indeed, was his new popularity confined to one sex only. Men, as well as women, saw his value more clearly in the light of his changed prospects, and gave evidence that they did so with an equally engaging candour. Mr. Brandon's death, which took place the following autumn, and brought him the inheritance so long foreseen for him by others, solved for him the enigma of his own recent success, and matured his character, besides changing his fortunes.

The sudden accession to wealth affects different men differently. In some it develops vanity; in some it develops pride. Its first effect upon Lacy was of a far more salutary kind. It

taught him the chastening lesson which vanity prompts us to forget, of how little of the great blessing of our fellow-creatures' good opinion of us is due, in reality, to any merits, or, indeed, to any characteristics of our own. Protected, therefore, by this knowledge, as by a kind of spiritual talisman, he was in very little danger of having his head turned by his increased importance, or even by his enlarged opportunities. Nor did he regard himself as exceptionally fortunate, when he was offered a post in Egypt which would have made him an object of interest to all the statesmen in Europe, and have invested him with more than the prestige of an average cabinet minister.

Any one who, acquainted with his outward history merely, could have seen him as he appeared now, and who, watching his face on his pillow, could have noted the melancholy tranquility that rested on it when he fell asleep, and repeated itself in his voice and gestures when he awoke the following morning, and gave orders to his servant about a journey, on which he was to start in an hour or two, — any one who could have seen him thus, would have found some difficulty in believing that this was one of the most successful of the younger men of his time — brilliant beyond most of his contemporaries in his talents, and the use he had made of them; fortunate in respect of his looks, manners, and family; and now at last endowed with the one gift hitherto wanting to him — wealth, which would establish his position, give power and independence to his actions, and enable him to command the world, which it had been hitherto necessary for him to conciliate.

His orders in the morning to his servant — an attentive Frenchman — were simple. "Breakfast at nine, in the dining-room. We must start for Euston Station not later than twelve." The dining-room was large and dingy; it had been decorated by Angelica Kaufmann; and almost lost in the middle of it was a small circular table, surrounded by an ocean of threadbare Turkey carpet. When Lacy entered it on this foggy morning, he found that it was difficult to see from one end of it to the other; but a shining silver coffee-pot filled it

with a hospitable odour, and a glow was radiated through the gloom from the capacious steel grate.

As he ate his breakfast he examined his correspondence, often forgetting in the process the claims of his toast and sausages. It was observable, however, that what principally arrested his attention was not the letters on stamped and ornamental paper — several of these invitations from friends who had caught sight of him the previous night — but bulky blue documents extracted from blue envelopes, and covered with writing in a variety of clerk-like hands. He treated his other letters as many men treat their bills, and read these as eagerly as many men read their love-letters. With an absent gulp he had finished his last cup of coffee; with an equally absent air had lighted a large cigar, and between the puffs was marking, with a red pencil, a quarto sheet that was full of figures and estimates; when the door was slightly opened, and he heard in the hall outside the voice of his man, François, apparently remonstrating with some one, who was plying and apparently disconcerting him with badinage and much laughter. A moment later François slipped into the room, so as to avoid exposing his master to the view of the person outside, and closing the door, said, "Mr. Brancepeth is here, sir. He declares he must see you, and would have entered here unannounced, if I had not persuaded him to wait till I inquired whether Monsieur was out of bed."

"What Mr. Brancepeth is it?" asked Lacy, putting down his letter.

François grinned. "I do not know what Mr. Brancepeth," he said, "except that it is the one whom the gentlemen call *Poodelle*."

Lacy first frowned, and then burst into a laugh. "Show him in," he said; and the words were hardly spoken before a figure, instinct with youth and eagerness, had rushed into the room, laughing and almost shouting, and gesticulating wildly with a brilliant-looking hat and cane.

The new-comer, who was dressed with extreme care, had a beardless face, encircled with short, curly locks, in honour of which he was called by his friends "Poodle." He was,

indeed, the young gentleman — for his aspect at least was youthful — whom Lacy the night before had watched from his corner at Lady Scarva's. Lacy and he had in former years been intimate, and had once been joint tenants of the same set of chambers, though the Poodle had contrived to monopolise two-thirds of the accommodation, and Lacy had been left to pay three-fourths of the rent. The Poodle, indeed, though he belonged to a well-known family, was himself the poorer son of a poor and deceased Queen's messenger. He had expended most of the small capital left him in the agreeable process of making his way in society; and society remaining his one and only profession, the fact that he lived, as a rule, on the best of everything, that he invariably drove in the most dazzling of hansom cabs, that the choicest of flowers perennially blossomed in his button-hole, and that he always had some new anecdote of some delicate pecuniary kindness done by himself to some poor friend in distress, was evidence of a skill in the art of polite self-maintenance, the mystery of which was not materially lessened by the further fact that thirty pounds a quarter was allowed him, and would possibly be left him, by a benevolent maiden aunt. With a heart even lighter than his purse, he was the embodiment of everything that is companionable. He was always unfailing in the little kindnesses of the moment. His voice, when he spoke to his entertainers, overflowed with grateful affection for them; though he was far too kindly to laugh at their foibles to their faces, he was far too genuine not to do so behind their backs; and nobody ever lost a reputation, or committed a ridiculous action, without the Poodle being the first person to hear of it, and to give it any completeness it might lack, by his varied modes of narrating it.

"Hooray," he shouted. "Hooray, my dear, dear, dear old boy. I heard that last evening you were at Lady Scarva's. Some one or other told me. I've not set eyes on you since you've become a Rothschild, and your poor old friend is still nothing but a Lazarus. François," he went on, pointing to Lacy's servant, and making a facetious pretence of being about to assault him with his cane, "François thought I was a dun

come to serve a little insinuating writ on you. He confuses me with the only people who, he knows, never forget me."

It was one of the characteristics of Mr. Poodle Brancepeth that he thought no one too humble to be treated with confidential friendship, unless his temper, which was usually admirable, got the better of his habitual judgment.

"I don't forget you at all events," replied Lacy, with unpremeditated cordiality. "Come, sit down. Have you breakfasted? My dear Poodle, I'm delighted to see you."

"If you are," said the Poodle, with a laugh which had the air of being at his own expense, "you won't be delighted long. No breakfast, thank you." And then, with a kind of sidling action, he drew his chair nearer to his friend, suggesting somehow the engaging behaviour of a cat who is about to rub its ribs against the legs of a human being. "Look here," he continued, "you were always — and I ought to know this if anybody does — you were always ready to do a *great* kindness to anybody. But what I want you to do, is to do me a *vary leetle* one, just one little wee kindness. I want you to cash this cheque for me," and he placed, as he spoke, a cheque in Lacy's hand. "I must pay Lewis & Lawrence a hundred and seventeen pounds in sovereigns by half-past eleven this morning, or else it's all up with me."

"May I ask," said Lacy, "why you don't go to your bankers?"

"I don't go to them," said the Poodle, "for the inconveniently simple reason that my quarter's money — what I have, you know, from my dear old aunt — is not paid in till three weeks from to-day; and if I sent this cheque to my bankers, it would come back with the words 'no effect' on it, which would mean that it would have the effect of putting me into the Bankruptcy Court. That's all, old boy. You were awfully good to me when you were poor, and then we used to lend each other five-pound notes so often; and I don't think you'll be less good-natured to your poor friend now you're rich."

Lacy did not answer immediately. He looked down; and

over the face of the Poodle watching him there crept an anxiety which seemed ready to transform itself into resentment. Lacy was reflecting on his former money transactions with his friend, to whom he had lent five-pound notes which were never repaid at all, and who sometimes lent him shillings, for which he was invariably dunned next day.

"Look here," he said presently, "when will this cheque be honoured?"

"I told you," replied the Poodle, "three weeks from now."

"Well," said Lacy, producing a stylographic pen, "alter the date and initial the alteration; and if you'll wait here while I go into the next room, I'll give you another, which you will be able to cash this morning. Come, make yourself comfortable; have some breakfast and a cigar."

The Poodle's face once more became radiant. "Dear old boy," he exclaimed, "how awfully nice and good of you. I can't eat anything. I breakfasted an hour ago. I assure you, I couldn't sleep for thinking about what was going to happen to me."

The Poodle, left alone, got up from his chair, and began to dance and whistle like any light-hearted schoolboy. Then he eyed the breakfast-table, on which was some strawberry jam, and after a moment's hesitation he spread some on a piece of toast. He was biting a large crescent out of this luxurious dainty when Lacy re-entered. The Poodle laughed, thus caught in the middle of his refection.

"You see I'm still a sweet-tooth," he said, as he received the coveted document; and hastily cramming the remainder of the toast into his mouth, in order to hide any difficulty in thanking his friend sufficiently, he reduced his acknowledgments to the syllables "Dear old boy," mumbled between sounds which resembled "yum, yum, yum," and were meant to indicate a burlesque satisfaction with the jam. As soon as ever he became articulate, he delicately put business aside altogether; he accepted a cigar, and, walking round the dining-room, broke into voluble praise of its dimensions, its proportions, and its decorations. "I'll tell you what," he

said, "all these lovely medallions — do you know, old boy, these are some of the finest things of their kind? — you should have them cleaned and restored without losing a moment. There's a little Frenchman in a slum near Fitzroy Square famous for touching up decorations of that period. I'll hunt him out if you'll let me. I should be quite delighted to take the trouble for you. Oh, by the way," and here, with explosive merriment, the Poodle plunged into a new kind of subject altogether, "you remember Lady Burnley — dear old fat Mother Burnley — who often gave us dinners when we two were living together? Well, what do you think has happened? She married a curly-headed courier, and has just had a baby as black as a Christy Minstrel."

Lacy laughed. The Poodle still excited a certain attachment in him, such as might one of the dogs from whom he borrowed his nickname. Reassured by the success of this piece of social intelligence, he plunged head foremost into a bewildering variety of others with a bounty that gradually assumed a half-patronising character, as though he were more than repaying the pecuniary obligations that had been conferred on him, and the true debtor were now not himself, but Lacy. Then, checking himself, he exclaimed, "Well, old fellow, I must be off. I shall just have time to administer my sop to Cerberus. And I say," he continued with evident self-gratulation, "I'm sure you'll be glad to hear that I'm pulling round generally, and hope by next summer to be quite clear of everything. I was thrown out of my reckoning dreadfully by poor Tom Brancepeth's illness. I provided him with every one of his little comforts, even his doctor. You never saw anything sadder. It makes me cry to think of it sometimes." The Poodle's voice here became elegiac, and he rubbed the back of his hand hastily across his dancing eyes, his conscience meanwhile applauding him for the devoted kindness with which he had lent a dying cousin a couple of railway novels and recommended a doctor to him to whom he was himself indebted, and whose claims he regarded as cancelled by this act of inexpensive patronage. "Well, good-bye, old boy, and thanks most awfully for helping me. Are you

long in London? If you are we might do a play together. I can get a box given me any night of the week."

"I'm off to the country," said Lacy, "in an hour from now." And the Poodle, who had been standing for the last minute in the doorway, gave a final wave of his hat and stick and was gone.

CHAPTER VII

Not long afterwards Lacy was gone also; the windows of the rooms he occupied were again blank with blinds almost as yellow as the fog in the street outside, and he was speeding to his home in his own northwestern county, through half-flooded midland landscapes smothered in wool-white vapour. At a certain point in his journey it was necessary for him to change carriages, waiting for half-an-hour at the junction where the change took place. The station possessed a refreshment room, at which he had resolved to lunch, and in due time he found himself taking his seat at the only table which this place of entertainment boasted, whilst a tall young lady, with a fringe, impertinent eyes, and half-washed hands — a mixture of rings and chilblains — condescended to ask him "what he would wish to take." It appeared that almost anything might be ready for him in a minute or two, but that nothing was ready now except some chicken bones, a dry ham, and a bottle of brick-red compound, labelled "Tomato Catsup." The fare was certainly uninviting enough, but Lacy was a man who, when the best was not to be had, always, with perfect good-nature, made the best of the worst; and frankly hungry as he was, he was very soon regaling himself with the ham, in spite of its dryness, and with square portions of bread, whose outer crust was as hard as the skin of any rhinoceros. He was thus engaged when two ladies made their way in from the platform, and one of them asked in metallic and half-foreign accents, occasionally seeming to substitute a "d" for a "th," what they could have to eat — fish, soup, or anything. There was something imperious, and almost insolent, in her manner, which reduced the young lady behind the counter to a condition bordering on humility. Lacy turned his head to see who the strangers were. He could realise nothing, except

that they were wrapped in furs, till presently they seated themselves at one end of his own table, and a glance at one of them showed him at once that he was in the presence of the utmost value in fashion, sealskin, and sable, that one woman when travelling could decently carry upon her person. Some slim jewelled bracelets tinkled upon the wrists of both of them, and a faint breath of scent was blown towards him across the forks and cruet-stands. A farther glance at them showed him that they were neither of them young. The lady with the foreign accent had a somewhat Semitic nose, and dark, overbearing eyes. Her companion, evidently her senior, who could not have been less than sixty, had a faded English skin cracked with self-important wrinkles. Of Lacy these ladies hardly took more notice than they did of the bottle of tomato catsup that was before them; and the younger of the two began, in incisive tones, to express her disgust at the refreshment that would most likely be brought them. It appeared that the footman of one of them, and the French maid of the other, had managed together to leave a luncheon basket behind — a basket which had contained, amongst other things, a fresh *pâté* from Strasbourg. "Well," said the elder, "I suppose we must take what we can get." "Look," said her companion, in French, with an ironical glance towards Lacy, "if only we, when we travelled, could borrow an appetite like that! We atone for our own good cooks by what we suffer from other people's. That is penance, my dear, eh? It is what we are doing now." A few minutes later Lacy heard two loud sniffs, and looking up, he perceived that beneath the delicate nostrils of his neighbours had been placed two plates, each with an enormous mutton chop on it. The elder of the two ladies, however, having appeased her dissatisfaction by her sniff, proceeded to eat with a hunger which she seemed afraid of her companion's noticing; for the latter, who supplemented her sniff with a delicate exclamation of "Pah," had pushed away her plate and remained a fasting martyr to her fastidiousness. But although she fasted, she did not remain silent; and Lacy's ears were presently struck by an observation which showed that she was a passenger for the same station as him-

self. He gradually gathered from a conversation which he could not help overhearing, that she was, with the help of her friend, engaged in searching for a house in the country; that she had seen several already, and that she was fast getting impatient at finding that none of them came up to her requirements.

"Dat place of Lord Matlock's," she said, "yes, it was pretty enough; but the bedrooms, all told, would hardly take in our servants. And the offices, Ach Gott! our *chef* would give us warning the first day he saw the kitchen. If dis other house we are going to does not turn out to be suitable, I shall have to wait till the spring, when we come back from the Riviera."

At this moment Lacy rose to go. The sharp eyes of the younger of the ladies watched him. They were dark, restless eyes, which nothing seemed to escape. "Dat man," she said to her friend, "has finished his feast at last. He's some squireen, I suppose. He is not a *commis voyageur*. Did you see the cigar he took out of his case as he was going? To look at, it was just like some that Alphonse has direct from Havannah; but those people at Hamburg make horrible things for twopence — dat man's case was full of them — which look every bit the same."

Presently a very tall footman, in all the dignity of powder, entered, and approaching the dark-eyed, fastidious lady, said, "Madam, the train is now coming into the station."

"Here," said his mistress, as she and her companion rose, "pay them for dis at the counter, and bring the change to the carriage."

Lacy, with some amusement, and a faint emotion of curiosity, watched, as he stood at the door of his own compartment, the magnificent bags, and still more magnificent rugs, which the footman and two maids, presided over by an obsequious guard, were, at a little distance, handing in to their mistresses. A few hours later, in the darkness which had now fallen, he was passing in an old-fashioned brougham through his own rusty gates, and with an odd mixture of feelings was noticing the weedy roadway and its ragged, untended borders — evidences of his recent poverty — which the carriage lamps,

with their travelling light, revealed to him. When he reached his own door, however, though weeds and blades of grass still sprouted in the crevices of the stone steps, his new fortunes seemed to be shining on him like a star, from a great lantern under the portico, now brilliantly illuminated; and a huge fire in the hall, and several well-fed men-servants, gave an air of restored prosperity to the neglected pictures and furniture.

In his London house, that morning and the previous night, Lacy had been the recipient of a little budget of letters. What he found here, as he entered, lying on the old billiard table, whose threadbare cloth was the colour of grass in August, was a large pile, in which long envelopes preponderated, though others were intermixed with them of more common proportions. Here again the long envelopes were what claimed his chief attention. He glanced at them as though pleased at the prospect of the work with which they threatened him. He began his work that night as soon as he had finished dinner, conquering, in order to do so, a vehement inclination to sleep; and the following morning he was up and immersed in business again, examining and marking and answering one lengthy document after another before it was broad daylight, and when his household was but just stirring. By half-past eleven, however, he at length came to a pause. Having thus far had nothing but some coffee, which he had made for himself over a spirit-lamp, he went to breakfast invigorated by a keen appetite; and, after breakfast he wandered about the house examining books, pictures, furniture, and other objects, sometimes as though he had some practical object in view — sometimes as though lost in a revery.

The house was a red brick structure of the time of George II. — a central block having two wings attached to it, and looking, as such houses do, twice its actual size. Its actual size, however, was very far from inconsiderable; and except for the minor changes incidental to daily life, it had hardly been changed since the day when it was first inhabited, and its owner had driven to its door in a gilded coach and six, which swung upon leather springs, and had four footmen at the back of it. The past generations of Lacys had had two

ruling passions. The one was art and literature, the other, not unnaturally, horses. The walls of the hall and the passages, wherever they were not occupied by ancestors, presented a painting of the winner of some race of the eighteenth century, with an odd little jockey standing at the animal's head, and a rough delineation of Lacy Hall in the background; whilst in several of the principal rooms were some of the works of Stubbs, full of the atmosphere of the by-gone racing world. But books at Lacy Hall were more noticeable even than racing pictures. The smaller sitting-rooms, of which there were many, were lined with them. Old plays and novels overflowed even into the bedrooms, and invited the guest to study Mrs. Behn or Mrs. Contlevre; and wherever between the bookshelves a modest space admitted it, there hung some landscape in water-colours, the work of Lacy's grandfather, who had been one of the most distinguished of the amateur artists of his time, and whose drawings were here by hundreds lying in old portfolios. As Lacy roamed from one room to another there was hardly an object which did not speak to his imagination; for all through his youth his family, with its failing fortunes, had not only made that passionate appeal to him which lost causes make to men of a certain temperament, but it had fired him, like Warren Hastings, with an ambition to restore its grandeur. His meditation, however, was interrupted by an event which was that winter a rarity. The weather became comparatively fine. There was vapour enough in the air to give mystery to the bare woods, but now and then there was sun enough to cast an appreciable shadow; and Lacy, exhilarated by the unlooked-for spectacle, abandoned his rooms and passages and went out into the park.

The house stood high on some gently undulating ground, which sloped down to a large, level expanse, and at an extremity of this, hidden away by trees, was a singular something which rendered the place famous. This was a building which now was called Old Lacy, and had, in former times, been the principal residence of the family. A portion of it had been destroyed, but the rest remained entire; and in it had also been preserved the ancient fittings and furniture, precisely as

they had been in the days of Charles I. The flags even in the hall were still kept strewn with mats woven of fresh rushes by an art that had never been lost there. Its only inhabitants now were an old man and woman, its custodians, who showed the place, at a fixed fee, to visitors. To this interesting memorial of the past Lacy took his way, noticing as he did so the neglected condition of his timber, and debating what he should do for his own dwelling as soon as the claims made on him by his farms and cottages had been satisfied. Old Lacy enjoyed a situation as picturesque as itself. It stood on a small island, in a pond of leaden-coloured water; and the visitor, as he passed over to it by a mouldering wooden bridge, felt as if he were passing out of real life into the shades. Lacy, when he found himself in front of it, and looked at its gabled front, whose dim and corroded brickwork seemed sodden with the sadness of the past, could hardly believe that what faced him was not a phantom, or perhaps, as he said to himself, a stucco model of antiquity.

He was about to approach the door and summon the old man and woman, when his eye was caught by an umbrella, whose magnificent turquoise-studded handle lay and glittered on an oak bench in the porch. Visitors were rare in the winter, and Lacy was still wondering who the owner could be of the costly toy before him, when a voice, almost at his ear, made him start by addressing him, and saying, with a certain *brusquerie*, "Do you know if we can get in?" The voice, slightly foreign in its intonation, did not seem wholly new to him. He turned, and before him were the ladies whom he had seen yesterday in the refreshment-room. The speaker was the younger of the two. Her aquiline nose had displeasure in it, and the face and attitude of her friend were likewise full of a sort of consequential grievance. Lacy was wrapped in an ulster of rough and weather-beaten tweed, a cap of the same material was tilted over his forehead, and neither of the ladies imagined she had ever cast eyes on him before. They both set him down as a keeper, or perhaps a bailiff, and addressed him as though they would visit on him the disappointment from which they were suffering.

"The driver," said the younger of them, "told us that the place was shown, and a regular charge made. It is wrong — very wrong — for such things like dat to be stated, and then for the place, when we come to it, to be shut up."

"The truth is," said the other, whose temper was less ruffled, "that the driver made a mistake, and brought us to the wrong house. It was Lacy Hall, not Old Lacy, that we wanted to see."

Lacy started slightly at this announcement, and was on the point of making some answer. Then he checked himself, and said, after a short pause, "I could, at all events, ensure your admission to that."

"What does he say?" said the other lady, turning round. "We shall be much obliged to you if you will. How far is it? What! a mile?"

"It is a mile and a-half to drive," he said, "and half a mile to walk. If you will allow me the honour of showing you across the park, your carriage could drive round. You will not find the grass wet."

The two ladies assented to this proposal. The younger, however, did so with a very grudging civility; and as soon as the way across the park began to be tolerably clear, she walked a little ahead of the other two, looking to right and left of her with an air of keen inspection, and applying to her eyes a *lorgnon* with a long, tortoise-shell handle. The other lady, however, now satisfied that she was talking to a superior kind of agent, fell into a mood of easy and condescending affability, and at last, after many questions about rents, farm stock, and farming, elucidated the situation by explaining to him that the lady in front of them was Mrs. Helbeckstein, the wife of the great South African millionnaire, that she was anxious to rent some suitable house in the country, and that Lacy Hall had been mentioned to them by a well-known London agent.

"I fear," said Lacy, "the agent has misinformed you. There was a time when the owner entertained the idea of letting the place; but his circumstances have recently undergone some slight change, and a tenant is now the last thing he is looking for."

"Those agents, then, have sent us on a fool's errand again," the lady exclaimed sharply, fixing her eyes on Lacy. "I had better at once let Mrs. Helbeckstein have the pleasing intelligence; though I doubt whether, in any case, this decayed place would have suited her." As she spoke she saw a smile forming itself on Lacy's lips. "Bless the man," she exclaimed, "may I ask you, sir, what you're laughing at?"

"I beg your pardon," said Lacy. "A slow light has dawned on me. I surely cannot be wrong in thinking you are Lady Dovedale. I have had the pleasure of meeting you once or twice in London."

The lady stared at him, a little taken aback. "Society," she began, "is really so large now. One meets so many people of all sorts and kinds. It could not," she said, "have been very lately, anyhow. I had, till last August, been abroad for nearly two years."

"It was several years," he said, "since you were conscious of being in my company; but I saw you — at least I saw your back — though I am sure you did not see me, the night before last, at that enormous party of Lady Scarva's. My name," he continued, "is Lacy — Tristram Lacy; and if I cannot show you my house with a view to offering it to Mrs. Helbeckstein, I hope you will let me show it to both of you with a view to offering you some luncheon."

Lady Dovedale, in her confusion, acquired a better complexion than she had ever — for she did not rouge — possessed for five-and-twenty years. "How stupid of me," she stammered. "How stupid of me. I'm afraid you must have thought me very rude. Lord Dovedale's health, you see, has kept me so long abroad; and she — Mrs. Helbeckstein — has been away for a year in Africa." Then, recovering her self-possession, she called out to her friend, "Constantia, we know that some people entertain angels unawares. I have just discovered that an angel has been entertaining us. This is Mr. Lacy himself; and he will not only show us his house, but is good enough to ask us to luncheon."

Mrs. Helbeckstein paused and turned, and acknowledged the introduction with a bow. As for her, she was not in the

least apologetic or discomposed. Though she was working her way into society, she was as yet but partially familiar with it. Her study of it had been, for some nine months, interrupted; and though she had often heard Lacy's name in London, she failed to connect him with the person now before her. She did, however, now identify him with the man whom she had noticed in the refreshment-room, and, instead of thinking more of him because she found he was the owner of the house, her expectations of his house fell because she found that it was owned by him. Indeed, his offer of luncheon, though she found herself unable to decline it, was accepted by her with a slight grimace, as though she had tasted something nasty; and she accompanied her acceptance by saying, with sublime condescension, "I'm very much obliged; I hope we shall not inconvenience you." It is true that her mood of mind underwent a momentary change when she reached the top of a slope, and the house was in view before her, with its long line of windows, the grey pillars of the portico, and the stately classical urns that ornamented its balustraded parapets. Mrs. Helbeckstein, however, had only two standards by which, in her heart, she measured things. One was the standard of London fashion as she knew it, the other their saleable value, which she appreciated with much more accuracy. She knew absolutely nothing of the country life of England, except what she had learned from one or two racing parties, where she made herself the indispensable friend of several ultra-fashionable ladies by the unfailing tact with which she lost her money to them at cards; but she knew from her recent investigations, and a study of the lists of agents, something of the current prices of country estates and mansions. Lacy Hall exhibited signs of neglect and poverty; no architect or contractor could have realised this more keenly; and she said to herself, with a slight sneer on her nostrils, "Pooh! fifty thousand — or less — would buy it all, out and out."

The trio reached the house, and mounted the steps of the portico. Lady Dovedale, though herself of uncertain breeding, understood the spirit of the place, and appreciated its shabby dignity, though her manner, as she expressed her ap-

preciation, still had a note of patronage. They entered the hall. Mrs. Helbeckstein glanced round her, and the first thing she noticed was a dim, round stain on the billiard table, directly under each of the old oil lamps; then she touched the cushions, and found them as hard as iron. The host showed his guests into one of the smaller rooms, which he had occupied that morning, and in which a fire was burning.

"I will order," he said, as he left them, "luncheon as soon as possible. It ought, I think, to be ready in twenty minutes."

"We shall have a repetition of dose mutton chops at the railway station. I fear, my dear, we are putting the poor man out," said Mrs. Helbeckstein, who, with the aid of her glasses, was already inspecting every object in the room. "Ach," she exclaimed, "do you see dis chair? The gilding is half off it, but yet it is quite genuine. How does a country squire come by a chair like dis?"

She was asking this question when Lacy re-entered; and not feeling equal to applying to him for an answer to it, she said, "Mr. Lacy, as we have not too much time, perhaps you would allow me to go through the house now."

"Certainly," he answered, perceiving that she had not been enlightened by her friend, and that she still regarded herself in the light of a possible tenant. He led her from one fireless room to another. Mrs. Helbeckstein commended the size of the two drawing-rooms; she closely examined with her *lorgnon* the lacquer of several cabinets; one or two of the chimney-pieces she pronounced to be "really nice," and carelessly observed that the library seemed not what she called very "readable." "And the bedrooms," she said at last, "how many are there, eh? What; you think thirty-six? Dere's the old difficulty again. We want twenty-eight for our own servants alone."

"I am afraid," said Lacy, "you have come here under a misconception. It was once supposed that this house was to let, but if I ever thought of letting it, I have quite given up the idea."

"Not to let," exclaimed Mrs. Helbeckstein, sharply. "In

dat case you ought to have had it removed from Messrs. Hunters' books."

"It was never on them," he answered, "with my knowledge or authority. I am sincerely sorry that you should have had so much useless trouble. I only hope you will believe me when I tell you that I am quite guiltless of causing it. But listen, there is the luncheon gong; and though my house is not to let, I am glad to think that you will let me show you the dining-room."

"Thank you," she said ungraciously, "I am not feeling very hungry. Well," she went on, when she rejoined Lady Dovedale, who had meanwhile been warming her feet at the fire, "here's another day of house-hunting lost, totally lost."

The insolence of this woman, though it amused Lacy, irritated him; but he had now in his mind a secret source of satisfaction, which was not the less satisfactory, because he admitted it was a trifle vulgar. Though his house might be dilapidated, though all its beauty and dignity should excite in Mrs. Helbeckstein nothing but indifference or contempt, his servants were unexceptionable. The butler was a family patriarch, fit for a duke's establishment. All Mayfair and Belgravia might through a whole season have been searched in vain for two more personable footmen, or for a valet who looked more like the confidant of a foreign prince. Lacy noticed how, as they passed into the dining-room, the eyes of Mrs. Helbeckstein fastened on these domestics; and then, as they seated themselves, there were further shocks in store for her. In whatever else Lacy Hall might be lacking, it was not lacking in an abundance of old-fashioned silver; and though Lacy was served to-day as his father had been before him, and just as he would have been if his two guests had been absent, the silver that was now on the table was recognised by Mrs. Helbeckstein, who had the eye of a dealer, and whose father, indeed, had been one, as possessing the highest value; whilst there was before each of the company an old silver plate-warmer. Her face, as her eye instinctively sought the hall-marks — her face, full of half-relenting bewilderment, was to Lacy an amusing study; but the climax of the drama

was at the moment when the first dish was handed to her, an omelet which she recognised as the handiwork of a first-rate *chef*. All the *hauteur* went from her expression instantly.

"Mr. Lacy," she exclaimed, "you are a conjurer, a positive conjurer. I have never, except in Paris or at Monte Carlo, had an omelet like dat out of my own house. You have a *chef*, eh? Frenchman? How does a bachelor in de country have a *chef* like dat, eh? Mr. Lacy, my dear, is very selfish to keep such a treasure to himself."

"When," said Lacy, "my uncle, Mr. Brandon, died, I took his cook into my own service, or perhaps I should say of such an artist, he was good enough to condescend to enter it. He did so only because he is something of an invalid."

"Mr. Brandon," ejaculated Lady Dovedale. "Yes, yes, yes, to be sure now. Mr. Lacy, I have been very stupid. I have been really intolerably stupid. Lord Dovedale read me the will out of one of the papers at Bellagio. You are that Mr. Lacy, of course. I remember you quite well now, but I hadn't at first put two and two together."

After this everything went as smoothly as possible. Lady Dovedale descanted on the beauties of her host's house, and quoted a number of her husband's more important relations as authorities in favour of her suggestions as to alterations and the cleaning of pictures. Mrs. Helbeckstein, who hardly knew one note of music from another, talked with enthusiasm of the opera, and its prospects for the ensuing season; she alluded familiarly to the best dressed and best known of the ladies, whose eyes and tiaras ornamented the Covent Garden boxes; she spoke of the concert-room she was building at the back of her own house in Upper Brook Street, and then plunged fearlessly into the subject of English politics, speaking with an ignorance so masterly that it wore the semblance of knowledge, and mentioning that her concert-room, as soon as the paint was dry, was to be used for a meeting of a great Conservative association. When the time arrived for the two ladies to leave, Lacy felt that their esteem and respect for him were quite as marked and sincere as their previous indifference and contempt.

CHAPTER VIII

When he found himself alone again, he broke into a quiet laugh, as he thought over the incidents of this little trivial comedy. Some people who, like him, having once respected their fellow-creatures, gradually, for some reason or another, lose their power of doing so, find that their former respect has converted itself into bitterness and aversion. Lacy, on the contrary, found that as his respect declined, its place was taken by an almost affectionate amusement, which the foibles of men and women increased instead of diminishing, as though they were the tricks of some odd performing dog. Such, at least, was the mood in which he thought of his late visitors, as he lit a cigar, sat down by the fire, and reflected.

But presently his mind changed, and his reflections took a deeper character. "These people," he said to himself, "will do anything because of my wealth; but what has my wealth done — what can it ever do — for me?" And his thoughts, as he asked this question, went back to his house — its relics, its dilapidations, over which he had been brooding in the morning, and to his own early dream of bringing its grandeur back again. He could bring back his grandeur now — or what had seemed to him its grandeur when a boy. He fully intended, indeed, to put it into good repair. But to do this seemed to him now such a little, such a commonplace thing. "What," he thought, "is family tradition? What is a long pedigree? I only know that I ever set any value on their possession, because I still have a fancied prejudice against people who don't possess them. All my romance of family pride is gone. It was but one form of faith. It has died with all the others. Yes, the loss of faith, as religious people understand it, has affected me, not so much directly by what it has done

to myself, as indirectly by what it has done to others, and to the world. It has made everything seem diminutive. It has turned stone buildings into paste-board toys. Modern knowledge and science — if indeed they tell us the truth — have broken in like daylight on the stage at an afternoon performance, leaving the scenery, but quite destroying the illusion, and putting our faiths, the footlights of life, out."

Then reverting again to a former train of thought, he said to himself, "It is possible I value wealth more than I think I do, but certainly, so far as my own consciousness can inform me, it has lessened my zest for life, instead of increasing or restoring it. It has taken away the little desire I felt to gain by a public career what are commonly called the objects of ambition; for the ultimate object with which these objects are sought, if I care for it, may be mine without them. I have seen successful generals come back covered with laurels. Why do they value them? Because they hope that on account of them they will command in the world at home the consideration of important men, the admiration of brilliant women. But if these heroes are poor, I, being what I am, should receive to-morrow more attention than they. The charming mother, and the beautiful marriageable daughter, will value me more because I have a kitchen with a French cook in it, than they would if I lived in a lodging, and had paddled in blood for weeks." And then speaking aloud with a bitterness which surprised himself, "No one," he exclaimed, "in the old days would marry me for what I was. Anybody now would marry me for what I have. And now, as it happens, I want to marry nobody. What should I gain then for myself by accepting this post in Egypt? And as for my country's claims on me, half-a-dozen men are wanting it, who would fill it as well, and perhaps better than I should."

He was interrupted in these reflections by a servant, who in that peculiar tone adopted by servants when announcing those for whom they have small respect, informed him that a man from Manchester was in the hall waiting to see him. Lacy at once roused himself. The man had come by appointment. He had come to discuss a business matter, which he wished to

explain personally. He proved to be the holder of ferociously radical views, being a secretary of a society for the expropriation of all landlords. He now, it appeared, was endeavouring to provide a kind of club-house as a meeting-place and occasional home for agitators and organisers of strikes; and his present object was to secure a site from Lacy, at a nominal rent, within easy distance of Manchester. Lacy listened to him patiently, and at last, with sarcastic good-humour, made him understand that his request could not be entertained for a moment. In reply to this the man, with a mixture of scorn and anger, hinted that landlords would, in a very short time, be no longer in a position to refuse or grant anything; and then, with an abrupt transition, he began descanting on the miseries of the poor, and the luxuries of the rich, to which he naturally held them to be due. "Look you there now," he exclaimed, pointing to a buhl writing-table which certainly occupied a rather obtrusive position, and looked as if awaiting its removal to some other place. The table indeed had formed the sole piece of valuable property belonging to a clergyman's widow who occupied a cottage in the neighbourhood, and Lacy had just bought it from her, with the option of repurchase, as she happened to be at the moment in extreme pecuniary distress. "Ay," continued his visitor, "what you waste in superfluities like that there would save — did you ever, I ask you, put it to yourself, Mr. Lacy, how many poor households what you waste would save from ruin? I've a brother-in-law in the cabinet trade, and I know what a bauble such as that table costs." "It cost me," said Lacy, "four hundred pounds last week; one poor family has been saved by it from ruin already. You will see this, if you will listen to the story; and then I must say good-bye to you."

The man retired discomfited as well as sulky, but though Lacy had had the best of this passage-of-arms, he did not get rid of the thoughts which it had indirectly suggested to him. Darkness had now fallen. The fire glowed in his sitting-room, and throwing himself into a chair by the hearth he began comparing his late visitor, his crude, distempered ideas, and the angry clap-trap of his phrases, with Mrs. Norham and her

friends, and the ideals of Startfield Hall. As soon as the servants had come in with the lamps, he went to an old portfolio which he had glanced at during the morning. It contained some of the drawings of his grandfather's, who had been a great votary of the picturesque; and these were records of a tour through Great Britain in search of it, made in postchaises at the end of the last century. Here in these drawings, these exquisite wayside sketches, the aspect and spirit of the country came to life again, as it was before railways and democracy had exercised their disturbing influence. Those days were now seen lying like dried rose-petals between the leaves. Here were the old villages, with the towers of their sleepy churches, and their placid rustics who had never listened to an agitator; the hospitable homely inn, the high-road, with its pack-horses and farmers' wives on pillions, and the wild glen amongst Welsh or Highland mountains, with only a rude cottage or two to break and enhance the solitude, and bare-legged children and women with quaint headgear, whose travels and thoughts were bounded by their own native horizon. These pictures, as he looked at them, seemed to exhale a peace which the world has now lost — not the peace of an impossible golden age, but the peace that comes from an instinctive acceptance by each of the outer conditions with which his birth has naturally surrounded him. In those days the problem for each was the adaptation of himself to circumstances, not the frantic attempt to adapt circumstances to himself. Then circumstances for each were a home, not a prison. "Mrs. Norham and her friends," he said, "would represent them as a prison, not a home."

A clock struck six. The post went at half-past seven. He closed the portfolio, and seating himself at a large desk, set himself to examine a series of reports and papers, correcting them, adding notes to them, or writing letters to accompany them, and committing the documents when completed to big business-like envelopes. They were addressed to builders, lawyers, agents, clergymen, Nonconformist ministers, farmers, and even farm labourers. This correspondence absorbed him till he was told that the postman was waiting. Then, when

his letters were despatched, he leaned back in his chair and laughed. "Am I, after all," he said, "one of Mrs. Norham's disciples? Do I, in my own way, also find the key to life in what she and her friend Mr. Bousefield call social endeavour?"

He felt that this was a new view of himself. It was one, however, which he might have some grounds for taking. The most definite effect his new wealth had had on him, when the first ferment of spirits produced by its advent had subsided, had been to surround him with a number of practical duties which, if not very stimulating, had the great merit of being obvious. These were duties connected with his family property — duties which hitherto it had been wholly beyond his power to fulfil; and they were rendered now all the more urgent and numerous by the condition into which consequently these impoverished estates had fallen. To such duties he had instinctively betaken himself as a refuge; he had given himself to the performance of them as he might have done had his good luck been a calamity, of which, instead of dwelling on it, he was anxious to drown the memory; and in this he had found the solace of an artificial forgetfulness of self. No detail with regard to the management of his property had been too trivial to command his keenest attention so long as it affected the life of any human being dependent on him; and for the last three months he had been living what was practically a cloistered life, differing from that of the cloister only in the fact that his cook and his servant were, as has been seen, those of a man of fastidiousness; and also in the further fact that, overwhelmed by fits of depression, he had once or twice, on the occasion of short visits to London, endeavoured to conjure some excitement back into his existence by the aid of a certain priestess who lived in St. John's Wood, and who thought it no simony to be paid for the gifts she gave him.

What struck him, therefore, as incongruous in his own position was this. Passionately attached as he was — if indeed he were attached to anything — to all that is stately and sedate and stable in society, he found himself here with movements on all sides of him — social movements of one kind or another, and he actually found himself playing an important part in

them, and experiencing, moreover, a moral relief in doing so. "After all," he said to himself, "this relief is an anæsthetic only. It is neither pleasure nor happiness. It does not even touch the secret sore of life." His memory then went back again to the days of his ambitious poverty, when he had for a short time been engaged to a dreamy girl, who having for six months professed her passionate truth to him, showed herself truer still to the duty she owed her parents by allowing them to marry her to the son of a shaggy millionnaire from Melbourne. "No young lady," he muttered, "would ever throw me over now. I have no inclination to give any young lady a chance — a chance of showing either how false she is or how faithful." And finally his thoughts returned to the celebrated Mrs. Norham, and to what he had said to her when he parted from her on her own doorstep. "If the most favourable conditions of life," he now repeated to himself, "do not bring happiness to the individual man possessing them, he can no more expect them to bring happiness to others than a man can expect, if all his best claret is corked, to make it a sound wine by distributing it amongst his poor relations. If this life," he continued, "is the 'be-all and the end-all' of existence, in all my best work for the poor I am but playing the part of a steward to the sea-sick passenger on a ship which is inevitably doomed to founder."

These reflections, however, failed to affect his conduct. They were but a passing interlude in his round of daily business — of interviews with men in broadcloth, and men in corduroys and gaiters, of trudging through damp fields, of waiting by muddy gates, of inspecting of unhealthy cottages, and of writing unnumbered letters. But on the fifth evening after his arrival, on handing some papers to his agent, he heaved a sigh of relief, and said to him: "Well, Baker, everything is settled at last that will want my personal presence for the next three months at all events. Anything else that may arise you and I can arrange by letter. I leave to-morrow, and shall hardly be back for a month or two."

"Yes," he said to himself, as soon as the agent had departed, "the end is at last come. For the first time since I have been

a rich man, I am free. What shall I do? — I, to whom the 'brave overhanging firmament' has come to be nothing but 'a pestilent congregation of vapours?' Perhaps, after all, this is merely some derangement of the nerves. Perhaps I should recover myself in some different and brighter climate. Well — the world is all before me where to choose. I may thank my wealth for that: but I shall not choose Egypt. One more letter," he continued, "and only one to write. If I stayed here much longer, I believe I should go mad with melancholy."

He wrote his letter, and despatched it. It was directed to Lord Runcorn.

His work in the country was over; but not the whole of his duties. One duty remained for him before he returned to London; and this was to pay a visit, which he curtailed to a day and night — a visit to his connection Mr. Millikin, who had, along with himself, inherited a part of Mr. Octavius Brandon's property. Mr. Millikin was a manager of the Buxton branch of the bank in which Mr. Brandon had been one of the chief partners; and Lacy the following day, with some sinking of the heart, found himself deposited at the portals of Mr. Millikin's Buxton villa. This gentleman, though connected with Lacy, had a very slight acquaintance with him: he had indeed always regarded him with a sort of shy and nervous reprobation; and the meeting that was to take place now was due only to the fact that some family matters had arisen, which required to be discussed personally. In Mr. Millikin's eyes Lacy represented the world, and something, moreover, of the flesh and the devil into the bargain. Mr. Millikin, on the contrary, was nothing if not immaculate; and although, as a banker, he was not unacquainted with Mammon, of the world, in a social sense, he certainly knew nothing. But if unacquainted with the world, he was intimately acquainted with the Church. He was indeed the pillar of the Anglican establishment at Buxton. He sang its praises when speaking as chairman at political meetings; and its spirit appeared to have permeated him so completely, that his customers when consulting him at his bank experienced a sense of surprise at his not intoning his responses to the busi-

ness questions they put to him. His house resembled himself. It was a villa of an ordinary type; but crosses and ecclesiastical emblems lurked on the porch floor in shining encaustic tiles, pierced through the india-rubber door-mat, and sprouted on the dormer windows. In the hall, when Lacy entered it, there were no less than four perambulators, married piety being always philoprogenitive; and the drawing-room into which he was shown, though its sofas and chairs were angular, was liberally furnished with parish magazines and hymn-books. Mrs. Millikin, who came rustling in half a minute after her guest's arrival, was the daughter of a high-church Canon, who had once been a high-church schoolmaster. She was a tall, thin, solemnly sweet woman, dressed meagrely in black silk, and wearing on her lips a smile of such ecclesiastical chastity that she seemed to have sprung from the union of a minster with some mortal mother.

"How do you do?" she said, in a low, staccato voice, giving Lacy for a shrinking moment a long, limp, cold, pink hand; and before Lacy had time to answer this searching question, it was repeated to him again in a somewhat brisker voice, and Mr. Millikin stood in the flesh before him. He too had lips smiling, but very prim. They were closely shaved, and flanked by demure whiskers; and under his dark eyebrows were a pair of little mouse-like eyes. He had something the air of a prayer-book turned into a man; and a stranger might almost have expected to see a marker hanging out of his pocket. Mr. Millikin was a trifle more voluble than his wife; for he supplemented the question of "How do you do?" by a second, which was, "Did you leave fine weather in Cheshire?" Considering the state of the weather at that moment at Buxton, Mr. Millikin could have hardly expected any other answer than a negative. He indeed did not wait for any; but continued with a little sharpness. "After your journey, I daresay you'll be glad of luncheon." As he spoke, there came the tinkling of a bell; and the readiness of the repast in question was announced by a butler who had the aspect of a clergyman in reduced circumstances. In the dining-room were already assembled five hungry children,

whose respective places were marked for them by five silver mugs. The wants of these innocents having been first carefully attended to, Mr. and Mrs. Millikin condescended to give attention to their guest, and endeavoured to make some conversation for him which might be intelligible to a man of the world, and yet severely suitable to the atmosphere of a Christian household. This at first was confined to a number of somewhat disconnected questions, put to him for the most part by the hostess, not the host. She asked him if he had been hearing any good music lately; if there were any good exhibitions of pictures that year in London; and if he had read what the Bishop had said at the Church House on the subject of begging. All these questions were put to him with the same kind of starched smile with which she might have asked him in church if he could find his place in his hymn-book. He answered them, however, in so becoming a manner, that Mr. Millikin, who was listening, thawed, and signalised the fact by beginning to indulge with his children in one or two family jokes; and at last, indeed, he became so daring that turning directly to Lacy, he repeated a story — the most reckless in his whole *repertoire* — about Alice Millikin, who, attending her sister's confirmation, found that, instead of her prayer-book, she had brought with her a copy of *Pickwick* — a story which appealed so overwhelmingly to the nursery governess, that her cheeks became mottled with crimson in her efforts to curb her merriment.

"Perhaps," said Mrs. Millikin, when, the last fragment of rice pudding having been scraped out of the dish, and having disappeared down the children's throats, she was placing the tips of her long figures on the tablecloth, preparatory to rising, "perhaps," she said, "Mr. Lacy would come out with me in half-an-hour for a drive; and meanwhile, dear, I will leave you and him to have a talk together over your sherry."

Everything, Lacy felt, had been arranged for him, so he submitted to fate gracefully. Mr. Millikin, who, within his own limits, was a very good man of business, suggested that they should look over some mortgage deeds and some other documents after tea, and pushing towards Lacy the sherry, and

a dish of robust apples, exhibited his friendly feelings by lounging a little in his chair, and looking out at the weather with an almost mundane grimace. Unfortunately, now that the chastening presence of Mrs. Millikin was removed, Lacy nearly undid all the good impression he had produced by adverting to the news which had filled all the papers that morning — that the wife of a well-known politician was going to proceed against her husband in the Divorce Court. Mr. Millikin's face once again grew rigid.

"It's a great mistake," he said, "that these pestilent cases are allowed to be reported at all."

"Well," said Lacy, trying to turn the matter off with a laugh, "unless they were, we should never be able to know which of our friends continued in connubial bliss."

"I'm happy to say," replied Mr. Millikin, with a slight snap of his jaws, "that such cases don't come *our* way." Lacy again attempted to recover his lost ground, by alluding with a kindly regret, which was very far from affected, to the death — known to have been a painful one — of Mr. Octavius Brandon. Mr. Millikin, however, for whom, though he was invigorated by the possession of Mr. Brandon's thousands, the mention of that most irregular gentleman's name was fraught with suggestions almost as unseemly as was the mention of the Divorce Court itself, administered to Lacy a reproof even more crushing than his former one.

"I'm afraid," he said, "that his life was a very great deal sadder than his death. Shall we come now? The carriage by this time will be ready."

The carriage was a new victoria, bought with Mr. Brandon's money; and if the effect of it had not been somewhat marred by the fact of the coachman's lip being adorned with a black moustache, it might well have justified the humble and secret pride which had made Mrs. Millikin so anxious to exhibit its elegance to her visitor.

All sorrows come to an end at last; nor was Lacy's drive with Mrs. Millikin any exception to the rule. Then followed his hour with the mortgage deeds and with Mr. Millikin, which the latter concluded by commenting on the extraordi-

nary state of mind in which a dying man must have been, who could add to his other awful responsibilities by leaving such sums of money "to those horrible women." Then followed dinner, which was even more solemn than luncheon; and at half-past ten, bed — which, as Lacy left early next morning, practically concluded the process of moral chastisement to which he had been subjected in this elevated and spotless household.

CHAPTER IX

THE following day in the train Lacy said to himself, "Well, this time to-morrow I shall at last be on my way to a place where I shall be able to possess my soul, for the first time since I have been rich." As the train carried him into the yellow darkness of London, through which some stray snowflakes were now beginning to fall, he hardly knew which was more repugnant to him, the thought of the London fog, or the thought of London society. The latter seemed only less wearisome than the society of Mrs. Millikin. And yet, with one of those inconsistencies from which not even the most logical are free, he was pleased to find awaiting him a note from Mrs. Tilney, asking him, if he could, to dine with her that very night. He despatched an acceptance at once, and was even a little disappointed when he found that the party, which was avowedly impromptu, was so small. After dinner, however, he had the excitement of finding himself on the defensive, for Mrs. Tilney, drawing him into a corner, reminded him of their conversation at Lady Scarva's, and his promise to let her know within a week whether he was going to Egypt or not. He was not in a mood to discuss with her the decision he had come to; so, in spite of all her arts, he left her curiosity unsatisfied. "I think," he said, laughing, "you forget what I really said to you. I said that if in a week you would look in the evening papers, you would find my decision there. Wait till to-morrow. Look in the papers then."

He was putting his greatcoat on with the intention of going straight home, when he felt in his pocket some paper whose presence he was at a loss to account for. He drew it out, and examined it before leaving the house. It was the card of

admission to the masked ball, which his friend at Lady Scarva's had given him a week ago, telling him that it would, if he did not use it then, be available this week for another and a similar function. Lacy surprised himself by coming to a sudden resolve. "It's to-night," he said. "This ball is to-night. I may as well go there as to bed. I would give anything for some amusement which rose even to the rank of folly."

The New Rotunda — for so was the building named in which his fresh experiment in the resources of life was to be made — was a more or less temporary structure in the middle of an unfinished square. It had been built originally for the home of a great moving diorama, which illustrated, in historical sequence, the chief events of early Biblical history. This exhibition, however, ultimately became bankrupt; for, appealing as it did to clerical and scholastic patronage, its failure — so the directors informed the Official Receiver — was caused by an opinion expressed by the Archbishop of Canterbury that it damaged the cause of Revelation by the prominence which it gave to miracles; for the truth was, according to this admirable Primate, that the inspired writers, of whose authority he was a jealous defender, not only meant alternately much less and much more than they said, but, when they spoke of miracles, something totally different. The Sacred Diorama Company having been accordingly wrecked by the great Broad Churchman's ridicule of its most orthodox and expensive effects, the building was sold, and under the name of the New Rotunda it became a skating-rink with a floor of artificial ice. It may possibly have been with some view to propitiating the Archbishop of Canterbury that the present proprietors, during the early months of the year, arranged a series of what they described as carnivals or masked balls, a carnival, even to an English ear, insinuating a recognition of Lent.

When Lacy, shivering from the rawness of the night air, was deposited by a cab under a brilliantly lighted portico, he was surprised at seeing not a single vehicle in waiting, and he began to think that the masked ball must be over, or else that he must have mistaken the night. On making his way, how-

ever, into an ante-room, full of seats and palm trees, he found himself in the presence of a number of grotesque figures, suggesting in an equal degree Father Christmas and beefeaters, which a second glance showed him were the door-keepers and other officials of the establishment. One of these having cheered him with the information that he might keep on his greatcoat, and another having looked at his ticket, a third pushed open a pair of swing doors and admitted him to the heart of the festivity.

He found himself in a circular hall, round which was a carpeted promenade, with a tier above it of gorgeously curtained boxes, the central space being occupied by a leaden-coloured floor of ice. On this were disporting themselves half-a-dozen *bizarre* objects — a bear, a pig, a poodle, a Punch, and a Little Red Riding Hood — the last of whom had apparently been for some time at school in Pimlico. Lacy, as he looked, began to be of his friend's opinion, that even Lady Scarva's party was dissipation when compared with this. His eye made a tour of the carpeted promenade, which contained at the utmost a few dozen spectators. At a little distance from him were two female figures in dominoes, who, although they might in reality have represented every temptation which St. Anthony experienced so much difficulty in resisting, were now sitting on a sofa in stiff and disconsolate attitudes as if they were waiting to be interviewed at an agency for domestic servants; whilst a few men, like French commercial travellers, strolled by, conscious of their evening dress, and seeking with sullen hope for somebody who might succumb to its fascinations.

Somewhat ashamed of his company, Lacy lighted a cigar and, sinking into a chair by the door, continued his observation. Presently, one after another, some new dominoes, all more or less tawdry, entered; and, having entered, seemed uncertain what to do with themselves. Their advent, however, attracted the lukewarm attention of a knot of men whom Lacy had not at first observed, and who now showed themselves on the outlook for any fresh arrivals. He realised, as he looked, that he was slightly acquainted with some of them.

They were men whose overcoats fitted them almost too perfectly; there was a superfluous self-assertion in their shirt-cuffs and their gloves, and their hats, which it seemed that their servants must have varnished together with their boots, had the inclination of the leaning tower of Pisa.

"Is any one coming?" said one of these exquisites to another.

"Well," answered his friend, "it's a bit early yet. Most of them, last time, didn't turn up till one."

"Who are these two?" asked another as two dominoes passed them, who had just accomplished a fruitless round of the building. "Darlings," he exclaimed, looking after them, "is that how you forget your friends? Not much there," he continued, as this appeal was neglected. "I say, Algy, do you see how that near one walks?"

Lacy smiled as these delicate accents reached him; and he saw that the speaker was none other than Lord Crowborough. If Lord Crowborough had been as much improved by the death of his elder brother as he was changed from what he had been at Lady Scarva's by the atmosphere of the New Rotunda, he would have been by this time far on the road to perfection. He was here like a sailor who, having quitted the uncongenial land, was once more able to exercise his sea-legs on a deck; and his velvet collar, his gait, and the extraordinary alertness of his eye, were all calculated to flutter the susceptible *demi-mondaine* heart.

"Come along," he exclaimed suddenly to a friend, "let us walk once round and see who is really here." And Lacy beheld him, and a gentleman equally splendid, who seemed to represent the ancient religion of the Jews in the same way as his companion represented that of the Christians, start together on their sauntering pilgrimage of inspection.

They arrived again, however, at their previous station, seemingly disappointed; and Lacy was amused to hear Lord Crowborough address himself to a man who was a principal shareholder in the Rotunda, and was calculating how much money the present company represented, and say to him in an aggrieved voice, "The English never rise to an occasion of

this kind. Why, hang it, if you speak to these women they take it into their heads that you're insulting them."

He had hardly, however, finished this brief plaint before his countenance underwent a sudden illumination. Two mysterious visions in black lace and violets were at that moment pushing themselves through the folding-doors.

"Ah, my angels," he exclaimed, drawing his bow at a venture, "and so you've come at last;" and seizing the foremost by both of her consenting hands, he began to examine the tip of her just visible chin, and to turn her to one side, and then a little to the other, repeating at each fresh scrutiny, "Darling, I knew I knew you," to which the lady, in tones of muffled archness, replied that she knew he did not, and dropped him so charming a curtsey that, to all appearances, he would have grown even more effusive if he had not, over her shoulder, caught sight of some new goddesses, and left her and her friend to receive the homage of his companions.

The company now having become a little more numerous, Lacy rose from his seat and himself wandered round the building. He saw many scenes being enacted not dissimilar to that of which Lord Crowborough had just now been the hero, and was saying to himself, "If the flesh and the devil can do no better than this, their resources must have fallen as low as those of the higher life," when he encountered an acquaintance — a young man in the Foreign Office — Cyril Watson by name, who was leaning against the wall, and was, as it seemed, looking on at the proceedings with a listless contempt akin to Lacy's own. He was a young man of considerable cultivation, who had published a volume of not unmanly poems.

"I never," said Lacy to him, "was at one of these entertainments before. I should have been more amused at any Free Kirk in Scotland. There's no one here who even piques your curiosity by making you think she could by any possibility be a lady."

"There may be a few in the boxes," the young man replied. "But, of course, this weather has kept people away. Ah," he exclaimed, as he took a bunch of violets from his coat, and threw them gently at a female figure that was passing. The

female figure caught them with a not ungraceful acknowledgment. She was none other than the recipient of Lord Crowborough's opening gallantries.

"She," said Lacy, "thus far seems the great success of the evening."

"Yes," said the other, in a tone of half-ironical sentiment, "she's rather nice. I can't help thinking I have met her somewhere before — I can't remember where — somewhere or other in Lampsacus."

This unlooked-for mention of that ill-famed, old-world city had a curious effect on Lacy's poetic imagination. It filled his mind with a vision of classical streets and temples, of twinkling lights and garlands, and breaths blown from the Euxine, and a night made wild and mystical with vague Priapeian revelry. He became a spectator of the past, not of the present; and felt himself roused from a dream when the young man casually observed to him, "If a lady does come, it's odd how you at once can tell her."

"Where? What?" said Lacy.

"These two," said the other, as with a nod and a pleasant smile he moved away in the direction of the recipient of his own violets.

Lacy turned and saw at a little distance two figures in black, who, partly by the perfection of their dress, partly by a something in their movements and carriage generally, convinced him of the accuracy of his young friend's observation. They might or might not be women belonging to the fashionable world, but they belonged, at all events, to the world of social refinement. For the first time since his arrival his interest was really roused. The two black dominoes he could see were looking about them, like people whose position was strange to them, though not exactly embarrassing. Close to where they had paused was a staircase leading to the boxes; and a moment later, out of the shadow of this, a man appeared, with his face half-hidden in his deep fur collar, over which floated the ends of a long moustache. One of the dominoes instantly took his arm, and, without a word, mounted the staircase in his company. Left alone, the other looked slowly round her,

with an air of contemptuous apathy, which even her domino could not hide. At last Lacy was conscious that her eyes were fixing themselves upon his. He returned the look for a moment, and then he went up to her and addressed her.

"Unless," he began, "you have come here to look for the only two things which up to now I have found, I think I may say, without exorbitant vanity, that you might amuse yourself worse than by talking for five minutes to me."

"Do you limit," she asked, "your invitation to five minutes?"

"If you talk to me all night," he said, "it will seem less than five minutes to *me*."

"You had better," she retorted, "tell me first what the only two things are which up to now you have found here."

"Solitude," he said, "without any of its compensations — degradation without any of its excitements."

"I," she replied, with a little low laugh, "have no need to come to this place in order to ensure the one. I am not, perhaps, sufficiently modest to think that I can offer you the other."

"I've a box somewhere," said Lacy. "I must tell you, in self-defence, it was given me by a friend. I was not fool enough to pay for it. My present feeling is that, unless you go away and leave me — which, after our long acquaintance, you will hardly have the heart to do — it would be difficult to make an immediate change for the worse. Shall we go to this box, and see if it is a change for the better?"

She took his arm; they mounted the half-lit staircase; and an attendant, who informed them that they could have a hot supper if they rang for it, opened the box-door, and left them in a curtained seclusion, which already contained a table laden with cold refreshments.

"I'm thirsty," she said. "Give me a little champagne; but look away whilst I drink it, for I'm not going to let you see me. I've finished," she resumed in a moment. "You are permitted to turn round. Push these arm-chairs a little more forward — will you? — so that we can see those mountebanks there below if we want to."

They seated themselves as she suggested, and looked idly down on the spectacle. Lacy was puzzled as to what his unknown friend might be; and began, with a view to arriving at some idea, to talk of the way in which English society amused itself. He spoke of dinners, balls, and parties of various kinds, commenting on the varying degrees of pleasure, ennui, and annoyance to be found at each of them. His companion listened, and though she did not say very much, she received his observations — such was at least his impression — like a woman who lived more or less in the world.

"Just think, now," he went on, "of the London garden party. The number of people in London who have gardens is, of course, not great; but still there are certain houses within a few miles of Hyde Park Corner with large and beautiful grounds." And he mentioned the names of several, adding, "No doubt you know them."

"I believe," she said, "they are described in every guide-book to London."

"Certainly one is," he said, "of which I was specially thinking — Hammersmith House, I mean. Well, if Hammersmith House was mine, instead of asking some fifteen hundred people to stare at each other, and eat bread and butter from half-past four till seven, I would have an entertainment which should last from seven o'clock till three in the morning. I would convert the grounds into an imitation of the Champs Elysées in Paris. I would fill the avenues with a series of Parisian cafés and restaurants, with singers, dancers, waiters, and bills of fare, at which the guests could make up their own parties, having dinner, or supper, or absinthe, at any hour they chose, and where they might think themselves at the Café des Ambassadeurs, if it were not that there was no *addition*."

The unknown lady laughed. The idea of so daring an entertainment seemed to tickle her fancy for a moment; but Lacy began to feel, though he did not feel certain why, that she was not anxious to be drawn into these social discussions. In another moment she showed that such was the case.

"Look here," she said abruptly; "though the light's none

of the best, give me your hands and I will tell you your fortune. I can always tell the fortune of any man I like; and the truth of what I can tell him is in exact proportion to my liking. So remember that, when you see what my skill, in your case, comes to."

This sudden and reckless overture took Lacy by surprise. His ears weighed the quality of her delicate voice as she addressed him. He was half inclined to resist, half inclined to abandon himself to, the spirit of which she appeared to be possessed. He hesitated a moment. Then he did as she bade him; and, with a view to testing her character in a new direction, said in a voice which was certainly not impassioned: —

> "If I profane with my unworthiest hand
> This holy shrine, the gentle fine is this —
> My lips, two blushing pilgrims, ready stand
> To smooth that rough touch with a tender kiss."

Without hesitation, and with something of the same coolness, she answered him in the words of Juliet: —

> "Good pilgrim, you do wrong your hand too much,
> Which mannerly devotion shows in this."

"But come," she continued, checking herself, "that's enough poetry. Let us now go on to truth. Listen! Yours is the hand of a man of old family; but you were not born rich — I should say very far from it; but then later — not very long ago, things changed, you had a fortune left you, which was quite unexpected by yourself. Is that right, so far? You nod and smile. Then it *is* right. Well — what more can I tell you? You are a man, I should say, of very varied interests. You have been a scholar. From the line of your head, I should say you were a thinker. You have also been a soldier. My belief is that you have been wounded. You have also been a politician. Up to a certain point you have been brilliantly successful; and — and — am I still telling you truly? — you might, if you like it, become more

successful still. Now then — judging by my skill in cheiromancy, how do you think I like you? Do I like you much, or little?"

He realised that in her voice there was a peculiarly charming ring, and there was a crystalline clearness in her articulation as she uttered this last question. She spoke, however — and this was a thing of which he suddenly became conscious — like a woman who was accustomed to command most things, and amongst others her own voice; and although she now began to convey the impression to her companion that she would grudge him none of the memories that are associated with a complete conquest, she conveyed the impression also that she was by no means the plaything of her impulses, but that they, on the contrary, were hers. He found himself accordingly still more doubtful than before whether to yield to a feeling of awkward and annoyed indifference, or else to accept the situation in the spirit in which it seemed to be offered to him.

"My beautiful clairvoyante," he replied after a short pause — "for I have enough clairvoyance myself to enable me to call you that — all you have said about me is true; but it is only part of the truth, and that part is as small in comparison with the unprofitable whole as your liking for me, if you knew the whole, would be in comparison to your indifference."

"Very well, then," she said, "finish your character for yourself. And yet why should you? When my sisters and I were girls, we were taught a little Greek by my brother's tutor. He was in love with all of us, which was his misfortune, and our fault; and I remember a Greek saying he translated for us, *The part is greater than the whole.* I have often been tempted by my own experience to ask myself how many lovers it takes to make up one man, but in talking to you, who are a man, I am rather inclined to remind you how very little of a man it takes to make up one lover."

"I see," said Lacy, "you are a thorough woman of the world. You mean by a lover a man whom you don't love."

"Well," she retorted, "and do you, with all your experience, think that to love a lover is a likely way to happiness?

If we *are* loved, we are burdened by another's jealousies or exactions. If we love, we are tortured or made ridiculous by our own. We long again for all the impossible things which a wise woman never thinks about, the lights that have gone out with the bursting of her first soap-bubble."

"My friend," exclaimed Lacy, "if you go on talking like that, you will make me love you, whether you wish it or not. You are talking my own language, not what I talk in society, but the language I talk to my sole companion, who is myself. That is the language of hell." His companion slightly started. Lacy smiled at this example of how women, who take little account of either hell or heaven in their lives, shrink at the mention of them as though it were a kind of blow. "Don't be afraid," he said, "the language is a very gentle one. It is not, as perhaps you fancy, a series of angry oaths. On the contrary, it is the language of those who know that nothing is worth emphasis. It is the language of those who see nothing before them but the night, and to whom body and soul and will, and the passion of which you have so flattering an opinion, love, have come to be nothing more than noises heard in a dream. There I am; there are my naked thoughts. I don't know why I have told them so plainly to you. I wouldn't have told them to my dearest friend if I had one; but with you, my masked goddess, who, being a goddess, know me, and who, being a goddess, will not betray your worshipper, with you I have no such reticence. There are my thoughts. They are like a shoreless, unfathomable sea; and, I tell you honestly, the only life I have on which I do not look with horror just floats on their surface in a cockle-shell of illogical protest against them."

He could feel that the unknown did not follow all his meaning, and his natural reason coming back to him, he began to feel glad she did not. Her good opinion of him, however, did not seem lessened in consequence.

"Put out your head," she said, "and look at the clock, will you? I am not staying in my own house. That is wrapped up in brown holland. In fact, none of my friends imagine that I am now in London. I have come up for the night to

play the part of a chaperone. A friend of mine has lent me what she calls her *maisonnette* in Victoria Street, which appears to mean a flat with a street door and a latch-key."

Lacy looked at the clock, and told her it was half-past one.

"It is time to go," she said, "you must come and call a cab for me. I am sorry," she added, "that you should have more sources of trouble than even I am able to understand; but give me your hands again, and I will tell you two things more about yourself. I have told you about your past already. These two things shall be about your immediate future. You will not discover who I am. You will respect my wishes too much to try. This is one thing. I will tell you the other in a whisper. To-night you will forget *yourself*, and for a day or two you will remember me."

CHAPTER X

WHATEVER may have been Lacy's memories some eighteen hours later, he was remembered by the evening papers, as he had told Mrs. Tilney he would be; and she, as she sat by the library fire with her husband before dressing for dinner, read the following paragraph out to him: "Mr. Tristram Lacy left London this morning for the Continent. He will remain abroad till after Easter."

"There," exclaimed Mrs. Tilney, "that answers the question. He, of course, has refused, and has once more thrown his chances away."

Lacy himself, whilst his conduct was being thus discussed, was standing, muffled in furs, on the platform of a Paris railway station, the pavement of which was wet with a multitude of slushy footprints, and along which flickered the feathers of a horizontal snowstorm. An hour or so later, when Mr. and Mrs. Tilney had reached the period of quails at a dinner-party of four-and-twenty, Lacy was composing himself to sleep in a *coupé-salon* which had been engaged for him, whilst a snowflake now and again, like a sea-bird following the train, peered in through the glass, and vanished into the roaring darkness. Another ten hours went by, and he woke out of a heavy sleep, to find that whilst he had been sleeping, a miracle had taken place. Where were the fogs, where were the snows, of yesterday? The windows of his compartment were fleeces of rosy moisture, bright as though with the light of the first summer morning of the world.

There are few changes in life, at once so sudden and complete, as that experienced by a man who, during a winter night, travels in a quick train from the North of France to the Mediterranean. The evening finds him in an atmosphere

saturated with clammy cold — in a Europe grey and bitter with death, decrepitude, and desolation. When he wakes, he looks out on a world which seems to have been born again. A new heaven and a new earth are shining for him. Lacy let down one of the carriage windows, and puffing in at him came a gust of southern air — an air that all the winter had known the cheeks of roses, and simmered with heat in the brilliance of cloudless noons. It came to him full of the smells and mists of morning. The dew lay thick on buildings roofed with Roman tiles; visions flitted past of campanili grey with age; walled towns slept on the shoulders of craggy mountains. Processional cypresses climbed the bare acclivities, and cloud and mountain mixed on the heights of remote horizons. He put his head out into the cutting and racing freshness. New joys of life, mixed with innumerable memories, seemed steaming up as out of some great censer. Olives were softly swaying, tall reeds were waving, hurrying brooks were flashing, and far away amongst the long streaks of sunrise hung the purple masses of the Papal Palace at Avignon.

At length the train stopped, and a number of nasal voices sang through the silence the announcement of "dix minutes d'arrêt." There were sounds of luggage-barrows making a metallic clanking along the platform. Doors were flung open, and the passengers in the train descended. Lacy descended also, bathed in the liquid morning. He stretched his legs, and drew in a deep breath, with the air of a man long a stranger to pleasure, and once again meeting it. Close to the carriage was arranged a buffet on trestles, laden with steaming coffee-pots, thick white cups, crescent-shaped rolls, and great bunches of flowers. Towards this the passengers flocked, Lacy adding himself to their number. Amongst these were several ladies, whom, despite the disguising dilapidations of the night, he recognised as ornaments of the polite life of London. He kept at a distance from them, saying to himself contemptuously, "I feel as if I should never wish to speak to a woman again." The medley of men, however, he contemplated with calm amusement, until his attention was caught by a forlorn-looking little boy, who, eying the cups of coffee, but unable

to push his way to them, was struggling in vain to fish his money out of his pocket. Lacy, who occupied at the buffet a position near one of the attendants, at once ordered a second cup, which was handed to him; and gently putting his hand on the little boy's shoulder, gave him his own place, saying, with a smile, as he did so, "Quick, drink that. I've paid for it, but I don't want it."

An old spectacled Abbé, who had watched the trivial incident, eyed Lacy benignly, and said, "You are a good man, monsieur."

"I am," said Lacy, "much afraid that your opinion of me says more for your charity than it does for your penetration."

The train resumed its course; the golden sun mounted; then came reaches of luminous blue haze, filled with the sparklings of luminous blue water; Marseilles was left behind, with its suburbs deep in foliage; and at last the railway slid itself close to breaking waves, and the colour of red promontories fledged with heath and pine woods. Loud bells tinkled at little wayside stations — stations whose gravelled platforms were glittering and simmering in the heat, and whose *chefs de gare* stood before glass doors which were hung with white lace curtains and embowered in Banksia roses. Presently, overlooking the line, came a villa on a high terrace, and white balustrades festooned with scarlet blossoms; and a little later, above the vaporous green of olives, rose something feathering in the air — the fronds of the first palm tree. It was near the hour of noon when Lacy, looking at his watch, began hastily to pitch some books and other articles into his dressing-bag, and his task was hardly finished when the train had come to a standstill, and the form of his French servant appeared at the carriage door. Lacy stepped down. He was nearly at his journey's end.

The asphalte platform on which he found himself was bordered by a line of offices, whose size and florid ornamentations presented a marked contrast to the fewness of the passengers who had left the train, or were entering it. Beyond the palings, indeed, there was an array of hotel omnibuses; but if it had not been for these, and one well-dressed *bourgeois* group,

the whole station would have seemed to be enjoying a sunny sleep. There was no hurrying noise of any adjacent traffic. Only on one side above the placid tops of some pepper trees, a few white modern buildings with mansarde roofs showed themselves; and on the other side, to the landward, was a little Provençal town, with its old-world streets, and its crumbling mediæval belfry. This was St. Estéphe-sur-Mer, which a company of Parisian speculators, by adding to it a boulevard, some hotels, and some villas by the sea, had endeavoured, but not very successfully, to turn into a fashionable watering-place. Lacy's destination, however, was quieter even than this.

At the station gate a light carriage was awaiting him, and having left his servant to follow with his luggage in an omnibus, he was soon being driven rapidly through the streets of the little town, whose echoes replied to nothing but the sound of his own wheels. The midday hush had settled down over everything, and the only signs of life which greeted him as he went by were straying smells of wood smoke and occasional whiffs of garlic, and now and again the face of some white-capped crone, who, seated within her doorway, peered at him out of velvety darkness. Leaving the town behind him, he passed through a belt of little gardens, protected from the road by glittering zinc rails, and each having within its precincts its *bastide*, like a coloured toy. Then came open spaces, tufted with heather and myrtle; then a stream, and then the spurs of a great pine forest. The forest rose before him in long and irregular ascents, till it reached the ragged summits of a long range of mountains, and a mile-and-a-half away, half submerged in this sea of greenness, lay a line of scattered villas, and a building which was obviously an hotel. This hotel and these villas formed the winter station of St. Laurent-les-pins, which, though founded, like St. Estéphe, by speculators twenty years ago, has for some reason never grown; and as if to show its superiority to human beings, retains in its stunted maturity all the charms of childhood.

Lacy had been led to select it as his present place of retreat partly because he knew it to be very little frequented; partly because he understood that somewhere or other in the neigh-

bourhood was the villa which sooner or later would be occupied by his uncle, the Prime Minister. He had accordingly ordered by telegraph rooms in the hotel just mentioned, the charms of which were duly recorded in the pages of the *Continental Bradshaw;* and he found when he reached its door that it more than answered to his hopes. It was entered through a portico from a hedgeless public road, on the other side of which were the wild fringes of the forest, whilst its principal frontage looked over its own gardens. When he entered it, it was pervaded by an almost monastic hush; nor did he, as he was conducted through echoing passages to his room, see any human being except the landlord, a waiter, and a chambermaid. The prevalent hush, indeed, was not much to be wondered at, as he found, when some hours later he went downstairs to dinner. The hotel, which was remarkable for the fewness as it was for the great size of its rooms, appeared to be only half full; and a table, which ran down the middle of a *salle-à-manger* frescoed with hunting scenes, was occupied when he entered by but seven or eight guests — most of them elderly ladies, who might have been cousins of Mrs. Prouse Bousefield, and who each sat down, accompanied by a piece of knitting, in a place which was duly marked by her half-drunk bottle of St. Galmier water. At one or two separate tables were subdued family parties — a German couple, with a trio of weak-eyed children; an English clergyman, with a high-complexioned, spectacled daughter, who talked in audible tones about University extension lectures; and a thin Frenchwoman, facing a tall, coughing husband, who had evidently learned from his illness the comforting moral lesson that it was not incumbent on him to consider anybody's requirements but his own. Lacy's table was placed near one of the windows, and he ate his dinner in a fit of odd abstraction, his ears being half amused by chance fragments of conversation, and his eyes straying over masses of sloping pine woods to the sea, on whose face the moonlight was showing its first sparkles.

After dinner, when most of the company had congregated in an adjoining *salon*, and were settling themselves to games

of dominoes, or to a pretence of reading crumpled newspapers, most of them ten days' old, he went outside, invited by a glimmering terrace, whence a flight of steps descended to the untidy garden below; and the solitude of the scented forest seemed to surround and press on him. He felt that he had taken some great and decided step in life. He had put aside his chances of a great public career, and he asked himself, "Why? and for what? And is it really true that I have done so?" Absorbed in these thoughts he could very soon have persuaded himself that his presence there on that terrace of wan marble, with the endless forest round him, and the clear air, so unnaturally soft, fanning him, was merely a dream, and that he would wake in another moment to find himself in wintry London, and its old problems and perplexities hanging about his neck like lead. "Perhaps, after all," he replied, "even that would be better than this fanciful and idle isolation for which I now feel I have exchanged it." The first excitement attending on a change of scene had subsided; and he went to sleep under his mosquito curtains, hoping that to-morrow's sunlight would bring him something of the peace which he had travelled so far to look for.

CHAPTER XI

The brilliancy of the morning, as it shone into his bedroom through his balcony, and awoke the roses and lilacs abundantly frescoed on his ceiling, did all and more than he had hoped it would; it thrilled him with vigour and spirits, and sent expectation through him as though it were an electric current. He drank his coffee, such coffee as never is drunk in England; his bath sponge seemed to drench him with some cool water of life. As soon as he was dressed he wandered out into the forest, itself a second bath of invigorating air and odours. Bells of flowering heather showed their transparent wax to him, glossy myrtles made thickets of aromatic shadow, and a little chapel, with its antique tiled roof and a grating in its whitewashed wall, through which he could see the altar, touched his soul with a vision from that age of faith which he and others like him have known at least in childhood. Ultimately, with a healthy appetite, he came back to luncheon; and in the afternoon he made enquiries of the landlord as to the villa that had been taken in the neighbourhood for the Prime Minister of England. The landlord, however, knew nothing at all about it, but advised Lacy to consult the principal house-agents at St. Estéphe. Lacy did so. By devious by-paths with which he soon grew intimately acquainted, he wandered down to the half-finished boulevards by the sea; he looked at the little kiosques, the pretentious but half-empty shops, and the large semi-animate hotels; he, moreover, consulted the house-agents, but they, too, could tell him nothing. He was amused by his quest for information, without being disappointed by its failure. The evening he devoted, at his ease, to some book which he had brought with him, and his

hopes for the days that were to come were stimulated by the day just ended.

His whole being for the time had subsided on a sense of spacious rest, which had all the stingless excitement of a happy schoolboy's holiday, or of romance as a youth knows it, when romance is still a dream. He ceased to think. He resigned himself to the pleasure of feeling; and old feelings, which he had long thought dead, revived in him.

The very view from his bedroom windows was each morning a new experience to him. Towards Cannes the Esterel Mountains ran their wooded barriers into the sea; towards Toulon were the violet undulations of endless high horizons; and all the southwest was full of the mysterious Mountains of the Moors, with a great crescent of the Mediterranean washing them, and far off at their feet St. Tropez, like a white star. A new experience was also his each evening, when the glow of the west turned the mountain pine-woods purple, and made the pink crags among them shine like rose petals.

Generally, after his early breakfast, when the day was still young, he would saunter through the fields to the old unaltered St. Estéphe. The soft wind would imperceptibly take his thoughts, and lift them with it into the air like thistledown; and all the idylls of the world seemed to meet in the little market-place, full of flowers and of the morning, with its brimming basin of old marble in the middle of it, and jets of water splashing the floating sunlight. Wherever he went, he was pricked by the consciousness of some fresh beauty. Sometimes he would pause fascinated by an old bridge, under the sepia-coloured shadows of whose arches groups of girls, like Nausicaa, would be engaged in washing clothes, making the water milky with moving soap-suds, or spreading their fabrics to dry upon bleached pebbles. Sometimes what arrested him would be a grass-plot dusted with daisies, and occasionally it would be the sudden advent of a soft silvery dimness, as a diaphanous cloud sailed by with its passing shower, which freckled the milk-white dust with spots of fading fawn-colour. Nothing was too minute to escape his delighted notice. The anemones at the edge of the woods touched him like notes of

music as he watched them blowing their globules of blue and crimson. He would even peer into the ditches by which the rich fields were separated, and would note how they were filled with the blue of gleaming sky, and how the tall, limp grasses, as they lay and floated along the water, had little diamond sparkles moored to their green borders.

And through all these minute experiences, the climate, that undying siren, sang its eternal song of the passion that underlies life, a passion that breathed in the faint breath of the myrtles, that seemed to sigh in the blueness of the blinding seas and skies, and even kept holiday in the front of wayside cafés, where sun-browned provençals refreshed themselves under shade-flecked pergolas.

So the days went by, each with its quiet vitality, giving him back an almost child-like feeling of innocence, which made such adventures as that of the New Rotunda incredible to him. But this state of things had the seeds of its own change in it. Before a fortnight was over, the pleasure which he continued to experience began of itself to generate a discontent and restlessness, by making him wish for some one with whom the pleasure might be shared; and his thoughts were running again on the coming of Lord Runcorn, who, whatever he might think of his nephew's recent conduct, had always been to him a sympathetic and fascinating companion. One of the first symptoms by which this discontent showed itself was the growing annoyance he felt at the sight of the visitors who were staying at his hotel, or of such occupants of the neighbouring villas as he encountered straying along the roads. Most of these last were French — people, apparently, of dreary and unfashionable opulence; and the aspect of two of them in particular began to be unspeakably depressing to him — two fat old ladies, with white, puffy faces, who used to frequent the forest, swaddled in loose black garments, and who were to be seen in the paths squatting together on two camp stools, each with a sketching-block on her knees, and one artist's umbrella over the two of them. The sight of these people made him home-sick for something different, for some one who, more or less, belonged to his own world. He was, indeed, thinking

of leaving St. Laurent for Nice, or else of writing to Lord Runcorn — which he had hitherto forborne to do — and asking him when he was coming, and where his villa was, when one morning something happened which induced him to change his mind.

In the forest, near the hotel, he discovered, as he looked down one of the paths, the familiar seated forms of the two old ladies, blocking it. There was a side path close to him, little more than a burrow amongst the brushwood; and in order to avoid them he turned off into this. The world of St. Laurent, however, seemed bent that day on pursuing him; for very soon through the leaves he saw signs of another figure moving along a similar path, towards a spot where the two joined. A glimpse of something pink led him to identify this apparition with the clergyman's daughter, whom he had heard in the *salle-à-manger* discussing university extension, and who often appeared in a wonderful hat alive with cherry-coloured ribbons. Not being anxious to encounter her, he began to walk very slowly, so that she, when he reached the junction of the two paths, might be ahead of him. In this manœuvre he was so far successful that the figure, when he reached that spot, was disappearing between some myrtle bushes beyond.

He saw, to his surprise, however, that he had been quite mistaken as to her identity. The slim figure before him was remarkable for her graceful carriage; the colour in her hat was the colour of the daintiest Parisian roses, and Paris alone could have produced a jacket like hers, which bespoke such admiration at once for its wearer's outlines and for its own. He trod on and crushed a dry stick in his path; and the sound, as he expected, caused the stranger to look round. He saw through her veil a pair of velvety eyes, a mouth that was very red, and cheeks with a faint flush on them, the rest of her skin having the sallow clearness of ivory. This was all he could see before the myrtles and brushwood hid her; but the sight was enough to impregnate, in a single moment, St. Laurent and all its neighbourhood with a new and disquieting interest; and without being himself entirely conscious of what

had happened, his thoughts of Lord Runcorn and his dream of departure had vanished.

We all know the proverb — "It never rains but it pours;" and that morning seemed destined to show Lacy the truth of it. When he returned to his hotel as the hour for *déjeuner* approached, the hall had subtle suggestions of something beyond the common. On one of the tables was lying a collection of unfamiliar sunshades, an assortment of straw hats, and some little canvas hand-bags; and an odour floated in the air of patchouli and half-washed womanhood, which generally accompanies the presence of the provincial *bourgeoisie* in France. As he was entering the *salle-à-manger*, the head waiter, who saw him through the glass door, approached him with an apologetic smile, and asked him if he would allow one of the gentlemen in the hotel to share his table, for that occasion only; the reason being that a holiday party from Toulon had arrived for the day, and the room was consequently overcrowded. The gentleman in question, said the waiter, was the English clergyman; adding, "He quite alone. The young lady she gone to St. Estéphe this morning for a music-lesson." Had Lacy been ill-natured enough to wish to refuse this request, he could hardly have done so without ceasing to be human; for the clergyman himself had advanced to second the waiter's overtures, and was bowing and rubbing his hands, all explanation and apology. Lacy instantly put him at his ease, and they proceeded to take their places. The clergyman had long ago discovered, and explained to the *table d'hôte*, who Lacy, as a public character, was; and was delighted with the chance of thus becoming acquainted with him. He was a pleasant, brisk-looking man, in the prime of middle-age, with an orthodox clerical collar, a valuable gold watch-chain, and trousers — the signs of his holiday — lighter than his black waistcoat. It appeared that in his own way he was something of an enlightened thinker, and was endeavouring on behalf of the church to make friends with science by an ardent devotion to the catching and classification of butterflies; and he opened his conversation with Lacy, as soon as they were both seated, by pulling from his pocket a box labelled "Black

currant lozenges," and extracting a fritillary of an excessively rare kind, which he said he had caught in the forest that very morning.

"I have," he went on, "been here for nearly six weeks; and there are few localities within reach which I have not visited in search of specimens."

Lacy saw that his new acquaintance was in that state of extreme volubility which so often results from a certain kind of shyness; and judged that it was kinder to him, as well as less trouble to himself, to let him run on, and himself remain a listener.

"This is," resumed the clergyman, "a singularly favoured spot — singularly beautiful, and singularly healthful to boot. I marvel — I positively marvel, that it is not more frequented — especially in view of the fact that the sanitation is alleged to be perfect."

"Certainly," replied Lacy, civilly, "St. Laurent has the merit of being healthy."

The clergyman leaned forward, with a smile of experimental worldliness, and said, playing nervously with his fork: "We may congratulate ourselves that our Prime Minister is shortly coming to this neighbourhood, and not to Cannes or Nice. You have heard of that, I suppose?"

"Yes," said Lacy. "It happens he is some sort of a relation of mine."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the clergyman, with an abrupt gesture of deference.

"But where his villa is," continued Lacy, "I have not been able to discover. I have inquired of the agents at St. Estéphe, and of several other people; but nobody is able to tell me."

"Ah!" replied the clergyman, with an air of superior knowledge. "I can well believe that. The local people here know very little about the visitors. To tell you the truth, this whole neighbourhood is in a curious condition. Almost twenty years ago, when the building mania was at its height, villas and hotels were run up, not only at St. Estéphe and here, but at several other little places between this and St. Tropez — St. Antoine, for instance, and some little place beyond — I

think its name is St. Hilaire. At St. Hilaire I'm told there's an hotel, and a regular little colony of villas; but hardly one of them has ever been taken, and even about those that have been, the people of St. Estéphe know, or pretend to know, nothing. These are local jealousies, I fancy — local jealousies. I should not be surprised if his lordship had taken some house in that neighbourhood. Would you allow me," he continued, "to give you a little piece of practical advice? As for St. Hilaire, it is somewhere off the line; but I should advise you, Mr. Lacy, take the train to St. Antoine, and ask the station-master if he knows Lord Runcorn's villa. He is an intelligent man, and he directed me in St. Antoine itself to a house which I certainly should never have found without him. I can only say that if Lord Runcorn is to establish himself in these parts, he will be as safe, quite as safe, as he would be if he were here."

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Lacy. "Safe? Safe from what?"

The possession of important news, as it is often amusing to observe, swells even the meekest man beyond his normal proportions. At Lacy's bewildered question, the figure of the clergyman distended itself.

"Is it possible," he said, "that you have not heard — that you have not heard the alarming news from Cannes? A friend of my daughter's tells her there can be no doubt about it, though the papers try to hush it up. There is a regular epidemic of typhoid there — three new cases this morning — this very morning; and the town, it is said, has not been so full for years."

Lacy, on hearing this, expressed the proper concern; and the clergyman, rejoicing in his sense of worldly knowledge, proceeded to name the villas of several Royal and Serene Highnesses which he heard, to his extreme grief, had long been considered unhealthy, and whose owners he could not but fear might be very possibly victims. "It is dreadful to think," he said, "that such precious lives should be in danger — connected as so many of them are with our own Royal Family." To these alarming items of information Lacy paid

little attention. But what the clergyman had said with regard to Lord Runcorn's villa remained in his mind, and, as soon as the repast was over, he hastened to the St. Estéphe Station, and caught a train to St. Antoine. On descending at the latter place, he at once addressed himself to the stationmaster, who was not difficult to find, as he was the only person on the platform; and asked him if he knew where the villa was which the English *milor* had taken. The stationmaster, shrugging his shoulders, said he had heard such a villa spoken of; and pointed in the direction of a rocky and wooded headland which ran into the sea, at a distance of some two miles. Looking towards it Lacy espied above the trees something that seemed a turret, surmounted by a gilded vane. "Is that the house?" he asked. The stationmaster shook his head. "That," he said, "is the house of the Comte de Villebois. The house of the English *milor* must be somewhere beyond that; but I could not say where. I am a stranger here. I am from Marseilles."

The information was meagre enough; but just outside the station was a well-kept road, which, extending itself along the sea-shore, led in the direction which the stationmaster had pointed out. This road Lacy accordingly took. For a couple of miles it lay between the pebbly beach and some meadows just beginning to be sprinkled with red anemones. Then it mounted into a region of sloping woodlands. Groves of cork trees and ilex trees clothed the abrupt slopes; and presently, by the wayside, Lacy's eyes were greeted by a wooden crucifix, which imparted a romantic primitiveness to the scene. He paused to scrutinise this; and then, on looking ahead of him, he saw at an angle of the road a pair of turreted lodges, a battlemented arch connecting them, and gilded gates between, twisted into coronets and monograms. He approached, and looking in through the bars, saw a sight which aroused his interest. He saw that the road within led directly over a bridge, which spanned a profound ravine, and led on the farther side to two elaborately antique towers, these also having gates between them. Beyond these second gates the road could be seen continuing itself, shadowed by myrtles and tall umbrella-pines, whilst here and there was a glimpse of

scarlet and white camellia trees; and garden flowers, with a somewhat meretricious prettiness, peered and glistened along the ledges of many of the overhanging rocks. Lacy stood at the gates, fascinated by this strange spectacle, and wondering whether he had come upon Lord Runcorn's villa at last. He rang the bell, and was waiting for the emergence of the *concierge*, when his eye was caught by a notice-board, on which were the words, "*A Louer.*" There presently appeared a woman of about thirty, with the look of a Parisian, who, quickly glancing at the stranger, seemed to see in him a person worthy of her best civility. "Has this house been taken," he asked; "or is it still to let?" "Still to let, Monsieur," she answered, with a pleasant laugh. "Would Monsieur like to enter and see it? He would be very welcome."

Lacy gladly accepted the suggestion. The woman fetched a hat, and a moment later he was crossing the bridge under her guidance. His feeling of disappointment at finding that the house was not Lord Runcorn's was entirely lost in pleasure as he cast his eyes around him. The ravine which the bridge spanned was even more striking than he had anticipated. It was of great depth; a rivulet splashed at the bottom of it; at one end of it, fretted by pines and palm trees, there twinkled in the distance a turquoise-tinted triangle of sea; and the ground beyond appeared to be a kind of island which the deep ravine completely separated from the world. The farther gates were opened, and he entered this mysterious region. The road climbed and twisted between masses of artificial rock-work, which in such a place had by contrast its own charm. Everywhere there was a sense of ancient and secluded woodland; and yet hidden away amongst this were hints of the most elaborate civilisation. At last amongst the leafage came a white flashing of balustrades, and after the balustrades a captivating monstrosity in architecture — a toy château, with a multitude of carved balconies, bracketed out against a declivity on a mass of stone substructures, and almost lost in masses of flowering creepers. Down in the depths below was the glitter of more gardens, little fantastic temples, and the basins of white fountains.

Lacy first thought the place was the caprice of some opulent *cocotte*, which nature and chance had invested with a beauty entirely unintended by her: nor indeed when he was taken indoors was this first impression obliterated. It was a house full of Aubusson carpets, china, and gilded chairs. Everywhere was colour and prettiness in a bewildering *demi-mondaine* medley. So at least thought Lacy, till he saw on one of the tables a little collection of books in the daintiest of modern bindings. Certain of these belonged to what may be called the *belles lettres* of devotion: the rest were the works of German, Italian, and English poets; and amongst these last was a small volume of Shelley. He took this up, and saw that many of the poems were underlined; and between two of the pages were the dried leaves of a heartsease. "Would Monsieur," said the woman, who was watching him, "like to see Madame's boudoir?" He assented. The boudoir was even richer in ornament than the drawing-room; but here the books which he noticed made an even deeper impression on him. Here were the works of Heine, of George Sand, and of Leopardi; and there lay on a beautiful writing-table a copy of *Wilhelm Meister*. On the wall above it hung a small drawing in water-colours, representing some scene characteristic of Southern Europe; and under it was a translation in English of one line of Mignon's song: —

"Thither, ah! thither, I with thee would go."

"Whose house is this?" said Lacy, abruptly. "As you see, I am a stranger here; so you will not be surprised by my ignorance."

"It is the house," she said, "of the Comte de Villebois. He built it for Madame, who has been dead since fourteen years. Madame was beautiful in her youth. Princes desired to marry her. Her mother was English — a lady of noble family, who ran away with a Venetian; and Madame had been a great singer. The house is kept as it was at Madame's death; and Monsieur le Comte has decided to let it, only because he has lost much money in speculations connected

with building. Monsieur perhaps would like to visit the gardens. One can descend to them from the balcony outside the window."

Lacy accepted the suggestion. "I shall be quicker," he said, "if I go alone;" and the woman answered that she would wait for him there at the window. He went down a flight of stone steps, so fantastic that he felt like a tenor descending from a castle in the side scenes at an opera. There were mazes of silvery walks amongst orange trees, palms, and aloes; there were more flights of steps, twisting through rocks and leafage; and in a few minutes' time he found himself on the confines of the artificial, and before him was a path which led into the untouched woodland. This presently emerged as a cornice high on a line of cliffs, along which it ran for possibly half a mile. There were trees above it, a cataract of trees below; and far down at the bottom the lazy murmurings of the sea. There was a sense of space here, combined with a sense of seclusion, and also subtly flavoured with suggestions of possible society, which made him draw a deep breath for the sudden pleasure it gave him; and he went back to St. Laurent filled with thoughts of the Château, — mixed thoughts of the lady whom he had seen that morning amongst the myrtles.

CHAPTER XII

The following day was Sunday; and when, according to his usual custom, he went out for his morning walk in the forest, he was conscious that his pleasure in existence had suddenly become deeper than it had been even during the past cloudless fortnight, for now its depths were stirred by some vague trouble and expectancy. Excitement floated in the resinous breath of the pine trees, and seemed to lie ambushed round him amongst the heather and in the myrtle thickets. Mermaids sat on the shining rocks of memory and sang of delights drowned in the waves under them. He thought of the Italian landscape in Madame de Villebois' boudoir, and kept murmuring the verse, hardly knowing what he meant by it, "Thither, ah! thither, I with thee would go."

Such was his mood when his steps by accident led him towards the chapel close by in the forest, the bell of which was now tinkling. He paused at a little distance and watched the figures of some peasants as, moving through the clear sunshine, they followed one another into the building. A sudden impulse prompted him to imitate their example. The interior had something plaintive in its simplicity, with its rudely whitewashed walls and its shabbily gilded altar-piece, and its votive pictures grotesque as the daubs of children, in which gawky Madonnas saved sailors in the midst of shipwrecks, or extracted travellers uninjured from the *débris* of capsized diligences. The sudden change from the outside world was extraordinary. What was this austere dimness, this solemn murmuring silence, pungent with the scent of evaporated incense, this secret core of a life so alien to the world outside — to the world of myrtles and blue voluptuous skies — the world of seas as blue, and limitless marine sparklings? Was

there here, after all, the true key to existence — the little leaven that leavens the whole universe — the supernatural in the heart of the natural, without which the world of myrtles could be merely a barren vision, and the blue of the skies and seas a tantalisation of the wasted spirit? Lacy stood by the old stone font and watched the service beginning. His heart went out to the husbandmen with their bowed heads, and the old wrinkled women with cheeks and hands like parchment; and he said to himself, hardly conscious that he did so, "We are all brothers in Christ." The service proceeded. He realised few of its details, but none the less it had an accumulating influence on his mind. It began by bringing to him a profound sense of rest — a sense that at last he had deposed some weary burden; and then on this sense of rest supervened a stirring of the imagination. It was as if the life which for all these years had been so blank and grey for him had now new lights in it, which were not of the sun or sea, but were rather such as in old Italian towns shine at street corners before the shrines of saints. Through the outer world a spiritual world seemed breaking, much as the realities of that outer world themselves break through the reflections in the window panes of a fire-lit room. All the issues of man's existence seemed to become vaster. His own soul was once more the theatre of a tremendous battle, whilst the pride and prizes of the world, strange to say, assumed a new importance, though the eternal issues to which they were all subordinated reduced them at the same time to a kind of solemn insignificance. Then these profound mysteries, as Lacy continued his meditations, seemed to turn round on themselves and carry him back to the world, with its myrtle-scented air, from which they had at first rapt him. They seemed to shoot themselves like pulses through all the passions and affections, staining them with fresh colours, and associating them by some hidden sympathy with the pink of the oleanders, and the rustle of the crisp myrtle leaves, and giving a deeper note to serenades in gardens of moonlit cypresses.

He was still absorbed in this dream when a movement amongst the congregation roused him, and he realised that the

service was over, and that the worshippers were about to go. He now, on turning round, perceived for the first time that a female figure, very different from her neighbours, was standing, prayer-book in hand, not very far away from him. She was beautifully dressed in black. There was a diamond amongst the laces about her throat, but her aspect was colourless, except for her half-parted lips. Lacy's eyes had hardly rested on her before they were encountered by her own. She was the lady who, a few days ago, he had seen for a moment in the forest. He thought that her face assumed an expression of recognition, and as he stood aside to let her go out before him, he made a movement that might be called an undeveloped bow. He saw that, as she went by him, a picture fell from her prayer-book. He picked it up, but by the time he had done so an old man with a crutch had intervened between her and him; so she was already on the path outside before he was able to restore it to her. Instead of merely thanking him, she looked him full in the eyes and said, as she took the picture, "I am glad that it has not been trodden upon." There was something in her manner which prevented his leaving her at the moment. They walked on a step or two farther, and then immediate parting was more than ever impossible. At last she said, laughing, "Though I am sure you don't remember me, I met you once in London. I sat opposite to you at dinner at The Chilterns. Shall I tell you who I am, for you needn't tell me who *you* are? I am a daughter of Lord Dovedale, and my name is Madeleine Seaton. I was married for a year, and for five years I have been a widow. My widowhood has most of it been spent away from London, not because my husband is dead, but because my father is ill. He has had to be continually abroad; and my mother is too energetic to be much of a companion to an invalid."

"When I met you," said Lacy, "you were still Lady Madeleine Marston. I saw Lady Dovedale just before I left England. She is coming to the Riviera, isn't she? I think I was told to Cannes."

Lady Madeleine laughed a little. "Yes," she said. "I suppose she will stay at Cannes, or in the Salle de Jeu at

Monte Carlo. Of one thing I am sure, she will not come to St. Laurent. Well, and so now we know each other; but there was one thing I did not know — that you were a Catholic. Are you one?"

She uttered these last three words with the sudden simplicity of a child, looking full at him with her dark eyes.

"Do you remember," he answered, "a story told, I think, of the poet Rogers, when some lady asked him what was his religion? He said that his religion was that of all sensible men, and when she asked him what the religion of all sensible men was, 'That,' he replied, 'no sensible man ever tells.' I am not going to answer your question like the poet Rogers. I will answer it more frankly, and yet perhaps not more clearly. I don't even know whether such a thing as a Deity exists; and yet for the past hour I have been in the presence of God."

She made no direct answer to this curiously intimate confession, but when she next spoke her voice had the note in it of old acquaintanceship.

"Where are you staying?" she asked him. "I mustn't take you out of your way." He told her that he was staying in the hotel. "So, too," she said, "am I. I arrived a week ago. I don't, however, wonder that we have never met till now, for my rooms are in one of the wings, which has a door of its own; and I am practically living with some friends, whose garden touches that of the hotel. I have been in England lately," she went on, her voice sinking. "I went there for the purpose of saying good-bye to something which I once valued, but which I found out to be valueless. That is the best of all 'Good-byes' or the worst. But it wasn't," she went on, with a slight smile at him, "my religion that I said 'Good-bye' to. Look — that is the villa where my friends the St. Germans live. To-day, however, they are away, and I shall appear at the hotel luncheon. Who shall I see? Will the company make me shy?"

"I don't think so," he said, "but as a precaution against such a contingency, will you sit at my table, and I will keep you in countenance?"

"Do let me," she exclaimed. "That will be really a relief.

In ten minutes' time will you come to my sitting-room, and then we will go in and confront the world together."

A considerable sensation was caused at the *table d'hôte* by the entrance of the tall lady, who carried herself with such natural grace, and whose dress was a loadstone for every female eye in the room. A consciousness that she was the object of this very ill-concealed observation, impelled her to seek shelter in conversation with her companion, which thus, with abnormal rapidity, ripened into ease and intimacy. They were both of them aware of the fact, and they were also both of them amused at it; and Lacy, who had confided to her his discovery of the Château des Fleurs, and had seen that his description interested her, at last exclaimed, "It is only twelve miles off. Let me order a carriage, and drive you there this afternoon."

Lady Madeleine leaped at the proposal, and the two were presently on the road, being hurried along by a pair of little jingling horses. Their drive was marked by one incident only, and this for Lacy was one of considerable interest.

Their road for most of the way ran close to the St. Tropez line, and just as they were approaching one of the side stations, a train went sliding past them, and gradually pulled up at it. "What an odd train," exclaimed Lady Madeleine. "I never saw one like it. Ah! now I see what is the matter with it. Except for the toy engine, and those two cars with balconies, it is all made up of trucks with private carriages on them."

"Upon my word," said Lacy, "and so it is. Where in the world can these magnificent vehicles be going? Stay — I know the colours. It is so. They are his — they are his. You wonder who I mean by *his*. I mean Lord Runcorn's — my illustrious uncle's. Let me try and catch one of his servants, and I'll find out where his villa is. I'm anxious to see," he went on, as he lashed the horses, in hopes of reaching the station before the train should have left it, "what the house will be like which has been thought grand enough to receive him. He's the sort of man who feels he ought always to be housed in a palace." He was still speaking, when there rose

a feather of steam from the engine. The train was again in motion. "Well, anyhow," Lacy continued, "his house is in this direction. Fancy coming abroad with all those broughams and barouches. To tell you the truth, if he were not a great genius there's a vein in his character which an enemy would call vulgar."

Lady Madeleine, however, could by no means admit this. It appeared that Lord Runcorn was numbered amongst her personal friends, she having met him some years ago in Italy, and having — so Lacy gathered — excited his discriminating admiration. Lord Runcorn was a man who continued, even in his old age, to rouse in women a curious romantic interest, which was certainly not diminished by the legends of his romantic youth.

"Well," said Lacy, "when he arrives, he will no doubt condescend to lunch with me, though I am only living in an hotel, and then you must come to meet him."

In half-an-hour more they found themselves at the lodge-gate of the Château. The same woman as before came to answer the bell, and seeing Lacy again, and this time accompanied by a lady, concluded that the lady was his wife, and that he was presenting himself as a possible tenant. The consciousness of this fact ripened their intimacy yet farther, and they found themselves talking together in precisely the confidential undertone which they would have employed had they been what the woman thought them. Lady Madeleine was as delighted with the house as Lacy was himself, and very soon she was in intimate conversation with their guide. Presently Lacy heard an exclamation escape her. She was looking at a miniature of the late Madame de Villebois. "To be sure," she said, turning to Lacy, "I remember the story now. Madame de Villebois' mother was a Miss Hartland, of Homeby — and Mrs. St. Germans — my friend at St. Laurent, whom I mentioned to you — is her cousin. I remember now, I have heard about this place, too. Madame de Villebois was a great friend of George Sand's, and was supposed by many people to have been the original of her 'Consuelo.'"

They lingered for some time at the Château. They strolled

through the gardens, and loitered together in the long walk above the sea; and he all the while was haunted by some words, then unregarded, which Mrs. Tilney had said to him casually at Lady Scarva's party. Lady Madeleine Seaton certainly was beautiful; but what interested him more than her beauty was her history, whatever it might be, at which Mrs. Tilney had hinted, and which seemed, so Lacy thought, to have left its traces on her whole manner and bearing. How must those eyes have looked — those eyes so tranquil now — those shining eyes so full of regretful kindness — when the man with the long moustache, the foreigner with the mad wife, woke in her that futile passion for which Mrs. Tilney pitied her! And was he the something which she said that she once had valued, and to which so lately she had been saying Good-bye in London? Having thoughts like these in his mind, which gave interest to her most trivial observations, he looked out with her from their height at the glittering solitudes of the sea, the shining lateen sails, and the phantoms of far-off promontories. They saw the headlong foliage outlined against the moving waves — waves that curled and broke perpetually amongst the grey rocks far below, and listened to the murmur that rose to them from those restless threshing-floors of the foam.

"I shall," said Lady Madeleine, on their return, when she was parting from him in the hall of the hotel, "be dining to-night with Mrs. St. Germans. I shall tell her you will come to-morrow. She will like to hear about the Château, which I know she has never seen."

The events of the day, as Lacy looked back on them, not only distracted his mind from a book which he was reading that evening, but invaded his dreams in a manner that was far from disagreeable. Despite her physical charms, and the pathetic romance of her personality, Lady Madeleine Seaton had excited in him none of those emotions which, as long experience had taught him, ultimately lead to love-making. On the contrary, what drew him to her was a feeling that she and he had both known romance, and had left it both behind them, though its wasted spikenard, for both of them, gave a fragrance to life still; whilst the impression which he had

derived from seeing her in the chapel that morning made him envy her as one whose being was still enriched by a faith in the value of things which was not any longer his.

With memories such as these there also mixed others, memories of Lord Runcorn's carriages, and the direction in which the train was taking them. "His house," he said to himself, "cannot be far off," and the thought of meeting him brought with it its own excitements. These last, indeed, stimulated Lacy so far as to send him down next morning into the modern quarter of St. Estéphe with a new and practical resolution half formed in his mind.

CHAPTER XIII

THE amiable janitress of the Château, in the course of her conversation with Lacy, had mentioned that the letting of it was in the hands of the agents at St. Estéphe, and what he had half resolved to do was to make an offer for the place himself. The rent, he ascertained, would be reasonable, though the owner would not let it at all unless he were personally satisfied as to the character of the proposed tenant. Lacy explained accordingly who and what he was, and desired the agents to ascertain whether an offer for the Château would be accepted from him if within the next day or two he found himself disposed to make it. The agents assured him that he need not fear a refusal, and engaged to telegraph to Monsieur le Comte at once.

He had quitted the office, and was walking along the empty boulevard which leads from the new town of St. Estéphe to the old, when he saw a solitary figure rapidly advancing towards him. For some reason which he could not explain, this figure caught his attention. It was that of a man in a very well-made brown suit. His hat was jaunty; he had a cane whose handle flashed, and in his footsteps was an elastic spring. As he neared Lacy, he came to a sudden halt, and there passed over his face for a second a slight expression of embarrassment. But this lasted for a second only. Then his face became one enormous smile, and throwing his hat into the air, he ejaculated a loud "Hurrah." "Dear old boy," he exclaimed. "By all that's wonderful, you don't mean to say that's you. Well, this beats cock-fighting. What on earth has brought you out here?"

The speaker, in fact, was none other than Mr. Poodle Brancepeth, whose eyes by this time were dancing with

enthusiastic friendship. "Of all the people in the world," he went on, "I wanted to see you most. You must be as surprised at finding me here as I am at finding you."

Lacy admitted that this was the case, and explained where he himself was staying. Then the Poodle breathlessly went on again. "I've got such news to tell you. I've almost weathered the point, that awful cape whose rocks are composed of creditors; and, dear old boy, hooray, I'll pay you all you lent me, and sixty per shent in the way of thanks into the bargain."

Lacy expressed in appropriate terms congratulation mixed with curiosity.

"Yes," said the Poodle, "such a bit of luck I've had. There's typhoid, you know — positively awful — at Cannes, and the people there will soon be dying like flies. The authorities have been hushing it up, but old Sam Davis, who's been awfully good to me —"

"Do you mean," asked Lacy, "Sam Davis the moneylender? He's the same person, isn't he, as your friends Lewis & Lawrence?"

The Poodle reddened, and for one second looked a little confused. "Oh," he said, "he's a member of the same firm, but as different from the others as chalk is from cheese. I know him as a personal friend. I've done a lot of good turns for Sam. Well, old boy, about the typhoid, as I was telling you. Sam Davis got wind of this ten days ago, and he knew that very soon there'd be a panic amongst the rich visitors, and amongst the others too, no doubt. But that's nothing to Sam. Well, what Sam does is this, for he knows this coast thoroughly. He sends me out to snap up all the decent villas in this neighbourhood; you can get them for a mere song; and he'll let them again to the fugitives from the plague at Cannes, getting, I need hardly tell you, three times the rent he pays. On every villa let I'm to have twenty per cent. commission, besides my out-of-pocket expenses. I'm going to have a bit of lunch now at the Hotel des Quatres Saisons, and then back I rush by the very next train to Cannes. Come," he said, putting his arm in Lacy's, "come and have lunch with me for the sake of the good old times."

Lacy could not refuse. He was touched by his friend's cordiality, though he could not help saying to himself, as he went along with him, "I wonder if my lunch will be one of your out-of-pocket expenses." The Poodle tripped up the steps of the hotel; he exchanged some jest with the *concierge*, and then, with the air of an intimate and favoured *habitué*, plunged into the office of the manager, whom he seemed first to be rallying on his relations with some lady, and then consulting earnestly with reference to food and wine. "Now," said the Poodle, emerging, "will you wait in the reading-room — you don't mind, do you? — whilst I am busy for a few minutes." It was half-an-hour before he again made his appearance. He then skipped in to Lacy, holding a letter in his hand, and having — but this did not catch Lacy's attention — a trace of ink on one of his fingers, which, before he had disappeared, was wanting. "More business," he said, as he stuck the letter into his pocket; "but this won't spoil by keeping, and the omelette will. Luncheon is ready, and I am famishing."

Lacy was surprised, and not altogether pleased, at the excellence and obvious expense of the repast furnished for him; and this feeling was increased as soon as he tasted the wine, which he at once recognised as Burgundy of the finest kind. "There are only two good bottles in this hotel," said the Poodle, "and they're half-bottles. This is one, and we'll top up with the other." He then resumed his account of his present mission, and explained that one of the reasons that made him so valuable an intermediary was the fact that he knew so many of the fashionable visitors on the Riviera, and that, in addition to securing villas in St. Estéphe and the neighbouring district, he was to secure a certain number of distinguished individuals as tenants for them. "You see," he went on, "that's where I come in useful. Cannes is full just now of timid and distinguished ladies, who must remain in the south, and will be frightened to remain in Cannes. I've half-a-dozen on the books for Sam's villas already, and when once they're landed, the whole business is done. Others will follow. You know what snobs the English are. It's too awful, isn't it? But I say, old boy, will you think me awfully

rude if I just glance at this letter? It may, perhaps, want answering."

He tore the envelope open, and appeared to be lost in its contents. As he read his face grew cloudy; he thrust the letter into his pocket, and then with a gaiety almost obtrusively artificial he went on to retail some of the current gossip of Cannes. Presently he stammered; he grew more and more inconsequent. At last he checked himself. "What in the world," he exclaimed, "have I been saying? Would you mind if for a moment I looked at that letter again?" He again extracted it from its envelope, and again appeared lost in thought. "Fill up," he said absently, and pushing the bottle towards Lacy, leaned his chin on his elbow and stared blankly before him.

"What's the matter?" asked Lacy. "You have had, I hope, no bad news."

"No," said the Poodle, with an air of heroic struggle against misfortune. "Only just, old boy, as I was getting along so beautifully, it is a little hard to miss one of the plums of the whole business."

Lacy asked how matters stood. The Poodle at first was reticent, but at last, with a desponding gesture, tossed the letter across the table. Lacy looked at it. It was in French; and though it was not entirely self-explanatory, the upshot of it seemed to be that unless a deposit was paid of five thousand francs on Monday, and another five thousand on Wednesday, it would be impossible to reserve certain properties, not specified, on the chance that Mr. Davis would ultimately decide on taking them.

"These," said the Poodle, mournfully, "are the best villas of the lot, and now I shall lose them simply because old Sam Davis has only given me just enough money to go on with. I can't even get at him by telegraph; and as for this deposit, I can no more pay it by Monday morning than I can fly. This will mean to me the loss of a hundred and fifty pounds. However, it can't be helped. At the worst, I've dropped in for something that's very much better than anything I'd any right to expect."

Lacy looked thoughtful; but his lips struggled with a smile. The Poodle watched his face as a dog watches for a bone.

"I suppose," exclaimed the Poodle at last — "but no, after all you've done for me, I couldn't ask you — dear old boy, I should hate it — to help me just once more. I couldn't ask it, only for just this once. Of course it would be only for three days at the very farthest, and I'd pay you faithfully every halfpenny back again."

For a moment Lacy was silent. The Poodle began to frown nervously. At last Lacy said: "You must explain the matter a little more to me. And yet no. Look here. Let me put the matter plainly to you. You think I am a rich man. Well, if I wasn't richer than I used to be, it would be absurd even to ask me for the kind of help you want. But many people have claims on me; and whatever I do with my money I must know what I am doing." The Poodle's face assumed a sort of frosty seriousness. "Now you tell me," Lacy continued, "you want this money for a specified purpose, and for a specified time. Well, Poodle, I'll take your word for it — your word as a man of business, and a man of honour as well. I'll post you a cheque for five thousand francs this evening, and that will give you time to telegraph to Mr. Davis for the remainder."

"Three cheers," exclaimed the Poodle, with his face suddenly irradiated. "Dear old boy, of course I'll remember everything. You're something like a friend, and no mistake. You don't know what this help is to me. In three weeks' time I shall be able to pay off everybody. Do you know," the Poodle continued, leaning across the table, and speaking in a voice of deep feeling, "it's an awful thing to be in debt — to feel you're keeping anybody out of any mortal thing that belongs to him. Sometimes at night I could almost cry for thinking about it. I say, old boy, what on earth is the waiter about? Why doesn't he bring the little *gigot d'agneau* they promised us? What have we got here? Do they want us to eat toothpicks? Hallo, *Garçon*, what's the next thing on the *mênu?* Are you going to give us an *entrée* of *cure-dents farcies?*"

The Poodle's spirits were rising with a most delightful rapidity.

"Mary had a little lamb," he recited, as the waiter put down the expected dish on the table. "Be like Mary, old boy, have a little lamb. I say, are you going to stop on here? For if you are, I can promise you that Sam and I shall very soon be waking up the neighbourhood. We're snapping up villas not only at St. Laurent and here, but we've collared a whole nest of them at a little place by the sea, with a brand new casino that has never been used yet. One of our tenants is — who do you think? Mrs. Helbeckstein. Mrs. Helbeckstein with old Mother Dovedale in tow. I ran Mrs. Helbeckstein when first she came to London. I sent out all her cards for the first concert she gave. I've done her a lot of good turns, and now my bread's coming back to me. But about these villas, old boy, at present this is all in confidence; for if the owners of some on which we still have our eyes knew Sam Davis's game they'd spring their prices immediately. There actually is a proprietor, a certain Comte de Villebois, who has a château which I meant to look at; but he's heard something, and declines to deal with what he calls speculators. Well," the Poodle continued, "I've my work at Cannes cut out for me. I dine with Mrs. Helbeckstein to-night. You never saw in your life a place like Cannes this winter. You'd think half London was there, a third of Paris, and the whole of Jerusalem. But what! who would have thought it? It's half-past three already. I ought to be off. You won't forget about the *petit cheque*, will you? Here's my address at Cannes on this envelope, in Sam Davis's own hand-writing. The autograph alone is worth all the money."

Lacy when he left his friend was haunted by some misgivings as to the wisdom of his new loan to that very unmethodical gentleman; but what chiefly occupied his mind was the enterprise of Mr. Samuel Davis, and a fear that M. de Villebois, in spite of his objection to speculators, might allow the Château des Fleurs to slip into Mr. Davis's hands. His own resolution therefore to take it, which an hour ago was vacillating, was now confirmed by a process with which most minds are familiar;

and he at once went back to the agents to make his offer absolute. The agents assured him that he might regard the matter as concluded; and he hastened back to St. Laurent in a condition of unexpected exhilaration, partly caused by the prospect of communicating his news about the château to Lady Madeleine and Mrs. St. Germans, on the occasion of the visit which he was now about to make to the latter.

The villa of Mrs. St. Germans, though not in itself remarkable, presented to his eyes as he entered it one interesting feature. This was a number of water-colour drawings on the walls, which seemed to him, as he passed them, to possess signal merit. In the drawing-room was Lady Madeleine, waiting to introduce him to her hostess, by whose manner and appearance he was instantly prepossessed and captivated. Mrs. St. Germans, whose father had been British Ambassador in Paris, had lived much abroad — a fact of which her personality gave some evidence. Her wrinkled face still had a delicate pink in it; her white, closely curled hair had the effect of powder; her dress conveyed an impression of brocade and black lace drapery, and she talked with a slight, but a very slight, foreign accent.

She was greatly interested in what Lacy had to tell her about the Château des Fleurs, whilst the news that he had himself taken it for the rest of the season excited Lady Madeleine no less than her. Monsieur de Villebois," said Mrs. St. Germans, "has of late been seldom there, though he has had a fancy, I believe, for keeping the house and garden just as they were on the day when his wife died. He and I had a little family quarrel; and I have not been very anxious to seek him in his own domains. With my granddaughter, however, the Château des Fleurs is a dream. She fancies it is some impossible romance come true."

"Well," said Lacy, "when I am there, I hope you will let me show it to you, and to your granddaughter also, if she is here."

"Oh, yes," said Mrs. St. Germans, laughing, "she's here." And then the conversation turned off to a topic the interest of which seemed to be growing general. This was the spread of

typhoid fever at Cannes, and the news, which, despite the Poodle's secrecy, had apparently begun to diffuse itself, that a number of empty villas near St. Laurent had been taken by an English speculator, and that several had been re-let already.

"By the way, Madeleine," said Mrs. St. Germans, presently, "what has become of Estelle? I daresay she would like to show Mr. Lacy the garden. The child believes she manages it. She is passionately fond of flowers."

"And so," thought Lacy, "there is a child here who grubs in flower-beds, with broken nails and a hot, freckled complexion." The *jeune fille* had never been a very interesting character to him, and he would far sooner have remained with his present companions than waste his admirations on rose bushes, and his good-nature on a young lady in her teens. He could not, however, help himself; for Lady Madeleine had risen from her seat, and, standing in the window, was calling to somebody she had seen outside. In another moment her voice had the desired effect. Pushing the lace curtains apart with a gesture of mimic petulance, there entered from the sunshine a figure clothed all in white, with a skin like a pale begonia, and eyes like a purple heartsease. For a moment, with a slight undulation, her figure poised itself in the window. Then she advanced into the room, as if asking for what reason she had been summoned.

"Here is some one, dear," said her grandmother, "who is anxious to see your garden. It is Mr. Lacy; and you will be interested to hear what he has done. What do you think? He has taken the Château des Fleurs. Show him your own flowers, and get him to tell you about his."

The girl fixed on Lacy a long, wondering glance. He rose and bowed to her, and she said quietly, "Will you come then?" He followed her out of doors. She was wholly devoid of shyness, because, as Lacy judged, she was a stranger to all self-consciousness. He was beginning to deliver himself of such civil phrases of admiration as he thought she would consider the due of her beds and blossoms, but she presently checked him by asking, "Are you *the* Mr. Lacy who fought

in Egypt, and was present at the signing of the —— Treaty? And have you not also been in the House of Commons?"

Lacy laughed, and admitted that he was the distinguished person in question. They happened to be standing near an upright pole or stick, evidently placed where it was in order to support a rose bush. She folded her hands on the top of this, and resting her cheek against them, looked at him with her head a little on one side. Her large hat framed her face in delicate shadows. The hands of the young gardener had the texture of satin.

He was so lost in a mixture of admiration and amusement that he did not attempt to speak, but let her look on in silence. Presently she said, as if she had finished her inspection of him, "And is it true that you have taken the Château des Fleurs? And do you intend to live in it?" He answered laughingly both of her questions with a "Yes." Her lips sharpened themselves into a half-mischievous smile, and she said presently, "Which is it most like? Is it most like a poem or a pantomime?"

"You," he heard himself answering her, much to his own surprise, "must come and see it for yourself, and, if it is not a poem, you will make it one." Then repenting of having paid such a compliment to a sensitive girl, he turned the conversation by pointing to a bush of roses, and asking her what her share in the management of the garden was. Her answer showed that she had some real knowledge of the matter. "But," she continued, "I like other things better than gardening; I like painting."

Lacy asked her what she painted. "If you will look," she said, "I can show you my attempts indoors. They are all on the walls."

"What!" exclaimed Lacy, "are those beautiful drawings yours?"

At the question she blushed with pleasure. "Oh," she said, "I wish they really were what you call them. Such as they are, the best are in my own sitting-room. It is over there. We can get in by the window."

He followed her, and with an air of humility rather than

diffidence she showed him a collection of landscapes, garden-scenes, sea-pieces, and various other studies of nature. He was astonished at the perfection of her *technique*, and the penetrating accuracy of her detail. But what struck him still more was her singular and almost startling originality; for in spite of the accuracy of their detail, her pictures gave the impression that she had been painting her own mind, rather than the scenes which she appeared to paint — that the mornings were her own gladness, the twilights her own melancholy. Lacy expressed by the tone of his voice more clearly than by his words his appreciation of her work and his sympathy with it.

"I often feel," she said, "that I could pour out my whole life in painting — in painting even one bough of an almond tree with its pink blossoms against the sky — five or six pink blossoms, as if they and the sky were everything. I go about in the woods sometimes, thinking of nothing else but painting. And yet, if one could paint no matter how well, it would only be, I suppose, a little bit of one's self one could put into it."

"If you want certain flowers," said Lacy, "to be of the largest size possible, you cut off many in the bud, and prevent them from blossoming at all. So I've been told; and our talents, I'm afraid, are like these flowers."

"You," she replied, looking at him, "have not acted on that principle. You have seen so much, and you have done so many things, and you are certain to do so many more. Look at this; it is something I want to show you. Here is my book of photographs of people who have done a great deal. You see the binding is covered with flowers, because it refreshes me to look into it."

She put the book in his hands, and seating herself close by on the arm of a heavy chair, watched him turn the pages, overlooking him as if she were a schoolmistress. The brim of her hat for a moment just touched his hair. Her photographs, no doubt, were of people who had done great things — statesmen, soldiers, thinkers, poets, and artists. "I have often tried," she said to him, "to get a photograph of you. But I couldn't. If you have one, will you give it me, unless you would dislike your company?"

"You propose," said Lacy, "to do my photograph too high an honour. But if I have a copy, it shall be yours. Listen, here is a bargain. I will give it you when you come to see the Château des Fleurs. And now," he went on, with the kindliness of an elder brother, "I must go back now and say good-bye to your grandmother. By and by we will talk of these things again."

She held out her hand to him. He could not avoid taking it. "Thank you," she said, "thank you very much for promising me your photograph, and for not thinking that my sketches have absolutely nothing in them. They have me in them, that's all."

CHAPTER XIV

Lacy found himself accepted as a tenant by M. de Villebois without delay, and at once sent to England for such servants as he required, and, together with these, for a large number of books. He could not, however, before some days had elapsed, move to his new abode without inconvenience to himself. He accordingly meanwhile remained in his present quarters, dining once or twice at the villa of Mrs. St. Germans, with whom he cemented a friendship that promised to ripen into intimacy.

He had duly despatched to Cannes the five thousand francs which the Poodle had begged should be lent him for three days only, but those three days went by, and he heard nothing from the Poodle about repayment. His affectionate debtor was, however, kept in his remembrance by other means than by a failure to fulfil his solemn engagements. The London papers, which reached Lacy at his hotel regularly, began now to contain paragraphs which not only announced that at Cannes the outbreak of typhoid fever was growing more and more alarming, but also gave glowing accounts of the charms and extreme salubrity of St. Estéphe and the coast adjoining it, mentioning at the same time that in this delightful neighbourhood there were furnished villas as beautiful as any to be found on the Riviera, and congratulating England on the fact that this neighbourhood, hitherto so neglected, had been chosen for his winter sojourn by the invalided Prime Minister. Lacy, in these and other similar passages, detected the hand of his enterprising friend the Poodle, and could not but admire the dexterity with which Mr. Sam Davis and he were turning the press into an unpaid-for advertisement for themselves.

Thus a week went by; the day of his migration came, and leaving his valet in the morning to superintend the transportation of his luggage, he went himself into Cannes to see about

jobbing some horses. This matter having been arranged, he was beguiling his spare time, before his return to the station, by sauntering along the principal street. In spite of the alarm of fever the place was gay and full, and he had not gone far before he met several acquaintances. He was talking to one of them, a man, at the corner of a side street, when a sound came sweeping towards them of hoofs and jangling bells; and a phaeton went glancing by, with a pair of high-stepping horses. This phaeton was driven by a lady, whose striking aspect showed that a variety of men must have entertained the opinion that she was beautiful, and that they had all been prepared to back this opinion with their money. She was not alone. There was seated by her side a man, whose face was radiant with animation and a composite kind of happiness due to a sense of being near her and pride in being seen to be so. The quiet perfection of his dress made him worthy of the position which he occupied. He looked as if his maintenance cost almost as much as hers.

"Did you see that young ass?" said Lacy's friend, contemptuously. "Where does the money come from? That's what beats me."

"Who is it," asked Lacy, "that you are talking of?"

"The man," said his friend, "who just went by this moment — that young Brancepeth, whom his friends, I think, call the Poodle."

"Do you mean to tell me that he's throwing away money on these women?" exclaimed Lacy, turning to look at the fast-disappearing carriage.

"There can be no doubt," said his friend, "about the fact of his throwing it away. The only wonder is that he has any to throw. Of course that woman, as you know, is supported by the Prince de ——. He, however, happens to be in Algeria, and this young fellow is keeping the house warm for him. But even such temporary happiness is not to be had for nothing. It was only last night that he was giving her a dinner at Nice, her and a dozen others, that must have cost him a thousand francs."

When Lacy shortly afterwards was once more in the train,

his thoughts of the Château des Fleurs, for which he was now bound, were not unnaturally chequered by thoughts of Mr. Poodle Brancepeth. The coldest philosophy and the warmest charity combined could hardly prevent these last from having a somewhat angry character; nor, indeed, when he reached the Château were matters very much mended. Lacy was a man who always, even against his judgment, was prone to make excuses for any one who had done him wrong. His conduct in this respect was a result of the forlorn creed which had robbed life of all that he once thought best in it. It was the charity of fatalism — the charity which rests on a sense that whatever the badness or baseness of a man's behaviour, he could not have behaved better than he did, or indeed have behaved differently. Just, however, as his charity of this cynical kind was allied with and reinforced by a natural kindness of heart, so on occasions was it illogically broken through by an equally natural outburst of ordinary human indignation. It was so on this present occasion when he reached the Château, and it was so for the following cause. After his departure from St. Laurent that morning a letter had come for him at the hotel; his servant brought it on to the Château, and it was there to greet him on his arrival. He recognised on the envelope the well-known caligraphy of the Poodle, and at once, before opening it, jumped to a conclusion as to its contents. "The Poodle," he said to himself, "has had his remittances from Mr. Davis, and is not only with very fair punctuality paying his debts to me, but is celebrating his prosperity by sharing it with that delightful lady."

In this charitable mood he broke open the envelope, and he found that its contents consisted of these few, but pathetic, words: —

"Dearest old boy, — The whole ten thousand will be sent me by Davis from London this day week. Do be a brick once more, and let me have the other five thousand till then. Everything goes through my fingers in deposits to these agents, and I have a most awful struggle to make both ends meet each day. Please wire reply. Your grateful, affectionate, but dreadfully anxious Poodle."

As Lacy read this, the fashion of his countenance changed. He rang the bell, and enquired at what time the post went. He ascertained from a servant who had been left by the Comte de Villebois that a letter, if sent in to St. Antoine before eight o'clock, would be delivered at Cannes the first thing the following morning. He at once sat down at a writing-table and answered the Poodle thus: —

"Dear Poodle, — It is a pity, since time is so precious, that you did not see me this afternoon at Cannes. If the friend, with whom you were driving, would have stopped her horses for a moment, you might have made your request verbally, and have had my answer on the spot. It would have been easy then to have made both ends of the situation meet."

When he had got thus far, however, his philosophy or his natural kindliness began playing their old tricks with him; and, though they did not dissipate his anger, they very considerably modified it. He tore up what he had written, and after a few moments' reflection, contented himself with sending the following few words instead of it: "I fear it is quite impossible for me to send you the sum you asked for. I am sorry you did not see me when you drove past me to-day at Cannes, as, in that case, I could have told you so then, and saved you some hours of anxiety."

Having despatched this he felt his mind grow easier, and resolutely putting all thoughts of the Poodle away from him, he abandoned himself to the pleasure of finding himself in his new abode, of tasting a good dinner after weeks of hotel cookery, of arranging some of his books, of looking out at the moonlight, and of thinking of the impression which at some not distant time the Château des Fleurs would make on his new friends at St. Laurent.

His bedroom windows next morning were wide open, he was dressed, had breakfasted, and had been out of doors for two hours, when the sunshine was still unable to make its way into another bedroom at Cannes, except through the closed *persiennes*. The twilight of this apartment was pervaded by a subtle and composite odour, suggestive of hair-wash, Ess bouquet, and cigarette smoke. The carpet, though not very

clean, had a thick and luxurious pile. On a dressing-table were ivory brushes, and bottles with silver tops; and a bed, whose mosquito curtains depended from a gilded cornice, was covered with the silken sheen of a sky-blue eider-down quilt. Beyond the sky-blue quilt rose mountains of white pillow, and in the soft middle of this whiteness was a certain curly head, whose eyes were surveying the prospect with a grave, semi-somnolent satisfaction. Close to his bolster, on a little marble table, were several French novels, an elegant gold watch, and a tumbler from which overnight the owner of the head must have quaffed some refreshing beverage, but which now was grey with the ashes of several recently consumed cigarettes.

"By Jove," said the Poodle to himself, as his gaze wandered round the room, "in what luxury we smart young fellows live now." And as if to give force to his reflection he stroked the silken surface of his quilt. Facing him was an overcoat thrown over the back of a chair in such a way as to expose the whole of its rich fur lining, and on this lay a gold cigarette case, adorned with a large monogram, whilst not very far away was a red Russia-leather dressing bag. The Poodle dwelt lovingly on the combined effect of these objects. He had carefully arranged them himself in their present positions in order that his waking eyes might feast on them as he lay in bed. "Upon my word," he murmured, "I look just like a Rothschild *en voyage*," and all the room became, as it were, a mirror to him, in which he saw sumptuous reflections of his own imaginary self. He had, however, in his own mind causes for self-respect even deeper than fur coats and dressing bags and one of the best bedrooms that money could procure him in the Hotel Splendide; for on the same floor, and not very far removed from him, were the quarters of a lady who was renowned for her high-stepping horses, and to whom, during the absence of her professional protector in Algeria, the enterprising Poodle had, about a week ago, successfully introduced himself by the vivacious *lingua franca* of his eyes. The acquaintance which was thus begun in the lift, in the passages, and in the restaurant, had ripened with surprising

rapidity; and the Poodle would by this time have been completely happy in the sense that she had left him nothing new to hope for if he had not been incommoded by certain unavoidable fears that he might be unable to secure a continuance of what he enjoyed at present, for already he found his finances in such a state that he could entertain her at dinner in his own hotel only, where he still could do so on credit; and he was daily anticipating that even his credit would fail him with the florists who had been daily sending her fifty francs' worth of their choicest bouquets and *boutonnières*, partly to thank her for her favours to him, and partly also to advertise them.

The Poodle, who on waking had, for a time, forgotten these difficulties, was at last beginning to reflect upon them, and to wonder with some irritation at the inconsiderateness shown by Lacy in not having answered his latest appeal by telegram, when a knock was heard at the door, and the *valet de chambre* of the hotel, in a soiled red jacket, entered, bringing in his coffee. Between the cup and the coffee-pot two letters were lying. One was directed in a thin feminine hand, the colour was saffron, and it smelt strongly of heliotrope. On this he implanted a kiss; he tossed it into the air and caught it; he then seized the other, glanced at it, and tore it open.

As he read it, his face grew rigid. He raised himself on his pillow and re-read it with a stare. It was the letter which Lacy had written to him the previous evening. "Alfonse," he exclaimed, "for the love of heaven be quiet. Don't make that damned *sacré* clattering with the window shutters. Do be quick and go. Can't you see that my nerves are out of order."

The man went. He had scarcely closed the door before a voice, which seemed calculated to startle even the very bedclothes, exclaimed, "Well, I'm blowed if that doesn't beat cock-fighting." Then followed a silence, during which on the Poodle's face a gathering thunderstorm of angry and plaintive thoughts seemed slowly to be marshalling its forces. At last he began muttering, "And after all I've done for him, too." But he had not repeated this ejaculation more than twice when the door resounded to a sharp, familiar rap, and into the room,

without waiting for an answer, there burst a tall, young man with a thin, dissipated face, and an air of rakish fashion in his clothes, his scarf-pin, and his sleeve-links.

"Well," he said briskly, with a very faint American accent, "well, Mr. Poodle, how goes it?"

"Oh, old boy," replied the Poodle, with a voice between a yawn and a groan, "I'm so awfully hurt and miserable. Take a cigarette and sit down a minute, whilst I just read this." And the Poodle, who, despite his present tribulation of spirit, saw no reason for letting an opportunity slip of showing himself to his friend in the best light possible, took up the scented letter, which he had not yet read, and opened it with a great display of its brilliant *demi-mondaine* monogram. "Well," he said presently, with another groaning yawn, feeling himself as he did so to be Lord Chesterfield and Don Juan in one, "women are an awful bore. Here's my little friend next door wants me to take her to Monte Carlo again to-night."

"And is that," said his friend, with a voice of agreeable irony, "is that, may I ask, the reason why you look so spry?"

"Indeed it's not," replied the Poodle. "That's neither here nor there. I'm so awfully hurt — I can't tell you. What do you think of this? Sam Davis by this time owes me thousands of francs as commission; and what do you think he does? He keeps all this back as fast as it becomes due, in order to repay himself a little trifle that I owe him already; and merely allows me my hotel bills, and a wretched little trifle for travelling. But that's not the worst. It's not that that hurts me so. You know, your name being George Brandon Parker, something of a gentleman called Tristram Brandon Lacy, though I daresay you've never seen him. He's your financial brother, in fact; for he's inherited your father's money. Well, in old days he and I were the greatest pals in the world — in the days when he was much poorer than I am; and in those days, George B., I was awfully good to him. I lent him money; I got him invitations in London; I can't tell you how much I did for him. And now, what do you think? I asked him, with all his millions — and it's the first time I ever asked him for such a thing — to lend me for a

week or two a petty two hundred pounds; and he writes me a damned letter to refuse me, as if I were some common swindler."

Mr. Parker looked at the Poodle with an expression of penetrating *cameraderie*. "I reckon," he said, "you've many friends who have given you a different answer."

The Poodle was saved the trouble of noticing this subtle innuendo by the advent of a new idea, which made him sit up in bed. "I say," he exclaimed, "and I'll tell you what he's done besides. I told him of a house, a place called the *Château des Fleurs* — one of the best of all the villas we've been after — I told him in strict confidence; and now I'm jiggered if he hasn't gone and taken the place himself, and done me out of two hundred pounds commission. Look here, old boy, put your hand on the bell. Have a pint of champagne. It all goes down in the bill. Sam's bound by his agreement to pay for all my necessaries, and when everything's said and done, what's more necessary than a friend?"

The Poodle was so pleased with this sally that his spirits began to revive a little, and by the time that Mr. Parker was quaffing a beaker of matutinal Clicquot and he himself had his nose in another, which he seemed to prefer to his cold and untasted coffee, he had already thought out a way from his immediate difficulties.

"I say," he exclaimed, "are you game for a real bit of enterprise this evening, this very evening? This little friend of mine — Madame Manuelos, *vous savez* — wants me to teach her a system to-night at Monte Carlo. I've never tried it yet; I've not had enough capital and, indeed, not enough time; but if she is willing to risk five thousand francs, you and I could add to it a little something. You could be my *miseur*, and, of course, if we made anything, you and I should earn a good percentage of the winnings — this is an understood thing — quite apart from any capital we contributed, which might after all really never be wanted. In fact," said the Poodle, his principles suddenly rising, under the rapid illumination of a new and ingenious thought, "such is my faith in the system, that I don't mind promising a second five thousand

myself — it will never be wanted — and simply going share and share with her, without claiming anything as the owner of the system, or as the player of it. Perhaps, however, George B., you'd rather wait a bit, and see how our luck goes. I'll send a little note in to Madame Manuelos at once. Dear old chap — give me, will you, my writing things. There they are between the cigarette-boxes and that case of goodies. Have a goody, do now, to correct the acidity of the champagne."

The Poodle's elastic temperament helped him over many troubles; and the gaiety of this last suggestion showed that he was at length himself again.

CHAPTER XV

WHATEVER were the results of the Poodle's excursion to Monte Carlo, and whatever were his feelings towards the friend who had, with sweet black ingratitude, refused to supply him with the last small sum he had asked for, he forbore to trouble him with any further letters. He wrapped himself silently in the dignity of his own injuries, and neither repeated his request for a new loan, nor made any allusion to the old ones.

Lacy for his part reciprocated this forbearance of the Poodle's, by severely putting him out of his thoughts, and devoting himself to his own pursuits. These were, for a day or two longer, of a sufficiently engrossing kind. He had books to arrange, letters from home to answer (for business connected with his property was once more pursuing him), and certain plans to settle with regard to the immediate future.

A few such days of occupied solitude had elapsed, when his steps, one brilliant afternoon, took him towards St. Antoine; and he found himself wondering whether that singularly unpretentious watering place was by this time the home of any clients of Mr. Samuel Davis. He was lazily pacing the road by the sea-shore, when the sound of weighty footsteps on the rough shingle roused him; and looking up he saw a female figure approaching him, whose aspect struck him as not altogether unfamiliar. Gradually as it came nearer and nearer, it assumed the likeness of Mrs. Norham. Mrs. Norham, though the lines of her drapery were somewhat less mediæval than they had been when she showed herself on the platform of Startfield Hall, was still like an embodied rebuke to mundane fashion in general, and she looked at Lacy with severe superiority in her eyes.

"Mr. Brandon, I think," she said, as he raised his hat and addressed her.

Lacy smiled as he perceived that she was still unaware of his identity. "I never expected," he said, "to have the pleasure of meeting you here."

"Really," said Mrs. Norham, stiffly, "since the newspapers for the last few days have done little else than busy themselves with the all-important fact of my whereabouts, it's refreshing to find that my presence here is still a surprise to anybody. My meeting you, however, is hardly a surprise to me. I saw you drive by with a lady, not many days ago; so I knew you were in the neighbourhood, although, I may safely assume that you are not honouring this simple little village with your residence. I've no doubt you are enjoying a very idle and agreeable time, as I presume you belong to that delightful and awful class which goes by the name of 'people of independent means.' But my world, Mr. Brandon, is a very different one from yours. I am here on these coasts of idleness for the sake, not of idleness, but of work."

"I remember," said Lacy; "you told me your plans in London. And how are your paying guests? Have you carried out that idea?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Norham; "and we chose this little homely place precisely because it *is* homely and remote from the fashionable world. One of our main objects in coming here has been to provide a change of scene for some of our worn-out helpers in the cause of social progress. Our house, or our houses — for we have three tiny villas — are yonder. If our abode is not too humble for you, I could give you a cup of tea."

Lacy accepted the offer, and committed himself to Mrs. Norham's guidance.

"And your *pensionnaires*," he said, "what sort of people are they?"

"You need not be afraid," replied Mrs. Norham; "we shall not ask you to meet them. I and the Bousefields occupy a house by ourselves, though all our party have lunch and dinner in common. No — you would not think our *pensionnaires* at

all elegant people. One is a tailor, who wears long hair. You would not get over that, even if I were to tell you, as I might, that this long-haired tailor has written a volume of poems called *Chants of Equality*, which is worthy of Walt Whitman. Then there is a farmer's son, who like Elisha has left his oxen, in order to devote himself to a series of *New Tracts for the Times*, to which he has given the title of *The Inferiority of our so-called Superiors*. We have earnest women too — young women who for most of the year are forced to waste their faculties as post-office clerks or accountants, but who are, under our guidance, becoming leaders in the new movement. There are others, too, whom you may have seen on the platform of Startfield Hall. It is amongst these people, Mr. Brandon, not in what you call Society, that you find the real forces which are moving the world onwards: and it is when living amongst them, and influencing them, that I am living my deepest life."

Mrs. Norham was thus discoursing in low but intense tones, when she and her companion, as they were taking a short cut across the shingle, were suddenly brought to a standstill by a shining and yellowish object, which signalised its presence, as they approached, by an abrupt and alarming movement. This object turned out to be a large umbrella, under the shade of which somebody had been reposing on the warm stones; and a moment later the umbrella was nervously jerked aside, and the somebody reposing beneath it was seen to be Mr. Prouse Bousefield. On recognising Mrs. Norham he scrambled up with alacrity, brushing the sand as he did so from the baggy knees of his trousers. His attention then turned to Lacy, on whom he gazed for a moment, and then, with a half-shy cordiality, greeted him as Mr. Brandon. "Mrs. Norham," he said, "told me she thought she had seen you the other day. We should never have expected to find you in so quiet a place as this. I hope it is not ill-health that has brought you here — nothing pulmonary."

Mr. Bousefield presented a highly characteristic appearance. His hat was a soft wideawake, which had lost all permanent shape; and his black alpaca coat had its pockets so

stuffed with letters that it made him appear as though his body were a mass of portentous tumours.

"I've asked Mr. Brandon," said Mrs. Norham, "to have some tea with us. He's not living here, but in the neighbourhood."

"Capital," said Mr. Bousefield; "capital! I'll turn in and have some too. Mrs. Norham has, I have no doubt, told you, Mr. Brandon, about our little colony here — our little nest of social workers. The thought that the climate is doing them a world of good is what reconciles me to the self-indulgence of basking in the sun myself. I can tell you also, so that you may not think too ill of me, that when I seemed to be lying there like a lotus-eater, thinking about the sea and so forth, I was correcting the proofs of an article on the *Expansion of Wesleyanism in England.* And then there's Tibbits — you remember Tibbits, don't you? — well, Tibbits and I are very busy together patenting and bringing out a really wonderful invention of his. It will be a very big thing indeed."

"I should have thought," said Lacy, "that according to the principles which I heard Mr. Tibbits enunciate at Startfield Hall, to patent an invention at all was simply to rob society, which had far more to do with the inventing of it than Mr. Tibbits himself."

Mr. Bousefield laughed genially. "Surely," he said, conveniently eluding the objection, "if any kind of possession is justifiable, a man is justified in possessing the work of his own brains."

Mr. Bousefield was a person who, like many others of his class, sympathised with socialism as a protest, but not as a practical programme. It supplied him with a number of phrases by which he expressed his sympathy with the poor, but not with any measure by which he proposed to benefit them. Indeed, Christian nonconformity excepted, and the virtue of male chastity, there were few things so sacred to him as property other than landed; and landed property even he regarded as an institution which deserved to be reprobated far more than to be tampered with.

"And may I ask," said Lacy, by way of changing the sub-

ject, "if you have come to any conclusion as to the practicability of the scheme I suggested to you — my scheme for enlarging the programme of Startfield Hall?"

"No," said Mrs. Norham, interposing with an air of authority. "Something might be done of the kind you suggest; but I doubt if it would quite satisfy you: and as we hope soon to have considerable resources of our own, we think it would be better, while thanking you for your most generous offer, to decline a gift which, if accepted, we should be probably obliged to use in a way that was contrary either to its donor's wishes, or to our own."

"Well," said Lacy, "the matter of course must rest with you. And Mrs. Prouse Bousefield, I hope she is quite well? She, if I recollect rightly, was rather of my way of thinking."

"Thank you," said Mr. Bousefield, without very much enthusiasm; "thank you. Mrs. Prouse Bousefield is in excellent health. I believe I owe my holiday here to her fears that I am not. Mrs. Bousefield," he continued, "is having a famous time. She does not, perhaps, take the same active interest in the work and the aspirations of our guests that Mrs. Norham and I do; but she naturally has charge of the commissariat — and capitally well she caters for us. Out in the market she is, at eight o'clock every morning, rubbing her French up, and managing to cheapen *primeurs*."

"I think," said Mrs. Norham, looking across Lacy at Mr. Bousefield, "we'll have tea in *our* sitting-room. If we went into the dining-room we should disturb Mrs. Bousefield at her accounts. Mr. Brandon, in our little organism we are obliged to have separate cells, where the various parts exercise their several functions. Here we are. This is our garden door."

A door in a wall admitted them to a plot of sandy grass, traversed by some weedy walks. It was shaded in one corner by a group of starveling pine trees; and was shared as a pleasure-ground by a block consisting of three dwarf villas, shining with crude plaster, and roofed with the reddest of tiles. Coarse net curtains whitened the lower windows, and out of those above hung bedding in the process of being aired.

From under the shade of the pine trees came a sound of

excited voices. Lacy looked, and saw some men sprawling in wicker chairs, whilst two young women, one of whom was indulging in a loud and uncovered yawn, were lying at their length in hammocks, their laps littered with papers.

"Well, Lizzie and Louise," said Mr. Bousefield, nodding cheerfully to them; "both your articles finished, I suppose, by this time? These two," he said to Lacy, "are the brightest little bodies imaginable. One is a Christian Socialist; the other, who is writing some papers on the *Abolition of Class Distinctions*, devotes herself in London to introducing, amongst the female employees of the post-office, a proper independence of manner when dealing with the general public. Look, Mr. Brandon, — that man's our tailor poet. A capital head of hair — eh? He's a fine fellow, every inch of him. This is the house," he continued, "which we — my wife, myself, and Mrs. Norham — occupy between us. The rest of the party have the others; though we breakfast and dine together. Ah," cried Mr. Bousefield, with a geniality which seemed somewhat strained, as a figure in stiff black silk emerged from one of the windows, "here's Mrs. Bousefield. My dear, we are bringing you an acquaintance. You remember Mr. Brandon, who pleased you so with his scheme of cookery-classes?"

Mrs. Bousefield's kindly lips puckered themselves into a shy smile; and she greeted Lacy with what seemed an incipient curtsey. Lacy was startled by a change in the poor lady's aspect. She seemed thinner and sadder than she had done when he first saw her in London; and her eyelids had a piteous look, as though tears were not far off from them.

"I'm delighted to see you," he said, shaking her by the hand warmly. "This air is better — isn't it — than that even of Startfield Hall?"

"It's just a lovely climate," she answered; "I can at all events say that for it. I can't say so much for the way in which the French build their houses; and as for their French cooks, and especially their French stoves — "

"I," interposed Mrs. Norham, with a certain annoyance in her voice as she saw how readily Lacy allowed Mrs. Bousefield

to engross him, "will order tea, and you will come to us, perhaps, when it is ready."

He acquiesced with a promptitude which annoyed her all the more.

"I see," he said, turning to Mrs. Bousefield, and slightly dropping his voice, "that your cook and your stove have a large party to provide for."

"Ah," said Mrs. Bousefield, "they're a queer lot; though I'll not say but that many of them will be meaning well; and Mr. Prouse Bousefield sees only what is best in everybody — in Mrs. Norham and in all. But they're difficult to content. I've often noticed, when I've been staying at a hydropathic or elsewhere, that no people in the world are so difficult to please at table as those who don't know good food when they see it."

Mrs. Bousefield was rendered so voluble by the presence of a sympathetic listener, that Lacy might have experienced some difficulty in leaving her, if she had not happened to look up at the bedroom windows, and seen the barefaced *exposé* of blankets, quilts, and mattresses. Mrs. Bousefield belonged to that admirable section of society which regards even the mention of a bed as something which trenches on indecency; and the foreign custom of exposing a bed's actual furniture brought all the blood of her father, who was a Free Kirk minister, to her cheeks.

"Mr. Brandon," she said hurriedly, "I must beg you to have the goodness to excuse me. Mrs. Norham does not mind it. I don't understand her feelings. It's something these French servants have done. I must go and speak to them again. You will find Mrs. Norham, and, I suppose, Mr. Bousefield too, in there."

Liberated thus, though he could not conceive why, Lacy entered the sitting-room, in which Mrs. Norham was awaiting him — an apartment with a red-tiled floor and a distorting looking-glass over the chimney-piece. Mrs. Norham was already seated with a tray of tea-things before her; and Mr. Bousefield, on the opposite side of it, was scratching his head with a pencil, and contemplating a sketch of a bicycle fitted

with the new invention — the "Tibbits Auxiliary Auto-Electric Motor."

"When we parted last in London," said Mrs. Norham to her guest as he entered, "we left unfinished a very interesting discussion. I hope — there is your tea; will you give yourself milk and sugar — I hope, if you should be walking or driving this way again, that you will allow me the opportunity of resuming it, and of showing you, now I am surrounded by this little altruistic colony, the reason of the faith that is in us, the soldiers of social progress."

Lacy was not at the moment particularly anxious to betray the fact that he was living within a couple of miles of this centre of spiritual influence: so he contented himself with saying that as he was a great walker, he hoped soon to be again at St. Antoine, and to avail himself of Mrs. Norham's suggestion. Mrs. Norham was gratified by this answer, but she was far from completely satisfied. She was like an intellectual war-horse, longing for instant battle; and she felt that Lacy ought not to quit her roof without one or two arrows of her wisdom sticking in him, by which to remember her.

"Of course," she said presently, speaking with a kind of gasp, and brushing some crumbs from her lips with the back of a reddish hand, "of course," — and Mr. Bousefield looked up at her with solemn admiration, — "altruism, which we sometimes speak of as new, is, like Darwinism, new only as a doctrine: it is not new as a fact. That all our deepest pleasures do as an actual fact arise from giving pleasure to others, and from a passionate consideration of their happiness, is one of the great discoveries of positive moral science; and we can no more get rid of this fact by saying that it is not reasonable than we can rid ourselves, by the same argument, of our belief in the external world."

Mr. Bousefield here made an indrawn sound of appreciation, something like that which a man makes who has suddenly cut his finger.

"What I," Mrs. Norham continued, "should wish to urge upon you is that old facts become dynamically new ones, by our arriving at a conscious recognition of them: and the

altruism of to-day, springing from such a recognition, is becoming virtually a new force in the world. One of these days, Mr. Brandon, I shall be able to tell you, as an example, the effect which it has had on my poor humble self — how it has enlarged my personal consciousness till it includes the loves of others, and makes their joys and sorrows, in the truest sense, my own."

Lacy was by this time on the watch for an opportunity of making a civil escape; and replying, as seriously as he could, to Mrs. Norham's account of herself, that she must, on her own showing, be a very happy person, he made a forward movement in his chair, indicative of a wish to rise. But Mrs. Norham still held him a prisoner.

"Ah!" she exclaimed, with a nervous contraction of her brows; "but it is not all happiness, in the common acceptation of the word. Thomas Carlyle would perhaps have called it blessedness: but it brings with it its pain — its aching pain — at least to some of us. For instance, half my own pleasure in looking at these seas and skies is made bitterness for me by the thought of the soiled, the blinded, the depraved, who are shut out from the vision of them — from the purifying influence of their beauty."

"If you will come with me," said Lacy, "during the week of the Carnival, to Monte Carlo, I will show you train-loads of the most depraved people in Europe, all of whom are free to enjoy as much of the vision as they desire. The perception that it does them no appreciable good might lessen your anxiety for those who have not a similar privilege."

Mrs. Norham's face gave signs of such anger at this flippancy as to suggest that there were some kinds of pain not felt by her to be parts of blessedness; and Lacy's visit might have ended with some awkwardness if a *deus ex machinâ* had not at this crisis pushed himself in from the garden, in the shape of a dirty-looking man, whose eyes flamed with eagerness.

"You'll *ex*cuse me, Mrs. Norham," he said, with an awkward bow to her; "but I must — it's of urgent importance — say something to Mr. Bousefield. It's all right. The whole

thing's going like a house on fire. You've made it all straight, I suppose, about them Founders' Shares?"

"Forgive me, Mr. Brandon," said Mr. Bousefield, rising, "I must bid you good-bye. Mrs. Norham, I hope, will induce you to call again on us. All right, Tibbits — I'll be with you in one instant."

Lacy himself had risen from his seat also, and was hoping to make his adieus to Mrs. Norham and Mr. Bousefield simultaneously. Mrs. Norham, however, detained him. "I should like," she said, "to have one word more with you. Mr. Brandon, the right way to understand what I have just been saying to you, is not to receive it with flippant and smart retorts. They are like a schoolboy's squibs, which prevent his seeing anything but themselves. No; the way to understand what I have been saying to you is to live amongst earnest people — not the idle, the empty, the fashionable, who are really the true vulgar, with their veneer of spurious culture; but that great strenuous class by which the work of the world is done. Mark these two men, for instance, who have just left this room. There is hardly an idea of mine to which they do not respond; and in them you have two practical, hard-headed citizens. They may perhaps be a lesson to you. As for Mr. Bousefield, — critic, scholar, thinker, — his talents speak for themselves; whilst as for Mr. Tibbits, — I daresay you don't know this, — he is one of the most remarkable inventive geniuses of the day. I may venture to tell you, in fact," said Mrs. Norham, speaking very gravely, "though the invention is not made public yet, that he has gone far, in this new machine of his, to solve the problem of perpetual motion."

"No doubt," said Lacy, "you see deeper into the forces of life than I do; but you, with your natural fastidiousness as a well-born and cultivated woman, must admit that Mr. Tibbits externally is not an impressive personality."

This was a very inadequate reply to Mrs. Norham's overwhelming announcement; nevertheless at the insidious compliment her prophetic lips relented. A moment later, when Lacy rose to go, she held his hand with an almost sympathetic pressure; and the door had hardly closed on him before she

began to reproach herself with not having extracted from him his address, so that she might secure his return to her ministrations.

As for him, though Mrs. Norham would hardly have been so satisfied had she known the effect which in reality she produced upon him, the feverish energy of her life, and her solemn belief in herself, had a sort of exasperating interest for him which stimulated his own faculties. She set him thinking afresh over the baffling problems of existence by means of the contempt she excited in him for her own solutions. But as he sat down to dinner that night a letter was placed before him, which completely put Mrs. Norham's, and indeed all philosophy, out of his head. It was a letter in a woman's handwriting — writing that was graceful, but un-English in its aspect, and also a little tremulous. The first few words of it told him all he wanted to know. "We have talked it over, and we will all three of us come; but we will not be a burden on you beyond the end of the following week."

The air was so warm that the windows had been left open; and straying scents and a soft splash of fountains stole in through the lace curtains, inviting him to go outside. When his meal was over he yielded to these vague blandishments. He stood on one of the balconies, submitting himself to the influences of the night. The air just made the leaves of the banksia roses whisper; the gardens below were like a censer, from which rose a faint incense. He rang for his hat and coat, and made his way to the walk which ran along the neighbouring cliff-side, and was now a favourite resort with him. His mind was possessed by a singularly pleasing tumult, and the darkness, just lit by a slowly rising moon, was in keeping with it. A gust of returning guilt went whispering and tingling through his nerves. The sea sang to him as it had done at his private tutor's at Brighton — where Juliets leaned from balconies on the King's Road, and every other pretty woman in the street had the beacon of Hero in her eyes.

At the far end of this walk was a thick wall of arbutus, which, so he had thought hitherto, formed the boundary of his domain. To-night, however, the rising moonlight happened

to strike with its glitter a narrow foot-path, of the kind used by coast-guards, which led into the rough woodland, and disappeared round a promontory. The spirit of adventure was awake in him, and he resolved to see whither it would lead him. He followed it for half a mile; then he left the coast, climbing across a ridge of pine woods, and he was on the point of turning back, when he found himself at the summit of the slope, and was looking down on a sight which made him fancy at first that he was not awake, but dreaming. Below him was a wooded cove, with a beach white in the moonlight, and a number of white houses, from whose windows lights were shining; whilst close to the sea was a building brilliantly illuminated, and from the building presently came the notes of a string band. Nor was this all. On the farther side of the cove the ground rose not in cliffs, but a series of gentle acclivities, and half-way up the ascent he descried a building even more romantic than the château which he himself inhabited. This was a long villa of the true Palladian pattern, having a temple-like centre, balanced by two colonnaded wings; and below were several lines of terraces bordered with balustrades, connected with each other by steps, and terminated by white pavilions. Lacy sat down on a rock and stared at the scene before him.

As soon as his first emotion of surprise had subsided, it occurred to him what this place must be. It must be the little watering-place of St. Hilaire, about which the clergyman had spoken to him, and which the enterprise of Mr. Davis and the Poodle had already been galvanising into life. "And that villa up there," Lacy said to himself with a slight laugh, "can be nothing else than the house that has been taken for my palatial uncle."

When he was once more indoors he re-read the letter which had reached him at dinner, and which had originated his present mood: and the thought of the words, "We will all three of us come," was the last thought in his consciousness before going to sleep.

CHAPTER XVI

THE following day there was a stir in the Château des Fleurs of the kind which, in a bachelor establishment, precedes the arrival of visitors. Dainty curtains, in bedrooms which had long been unoccupied, were being unfolded and hung up; and there was much mysterious agitation amongst mattresses and bedroom furniture. As for Lacy, as early as he could in the morning, he escaped from his disturbed abode, and retracing his last night's footsteps, went to see if the little watering place he had lit upon was really what he had guessed it must be. He found that he had guessed correctly; and St. Hilaire seen by daylight was even prettier, and far more lively-looking, than St. Hilaire seen under the moon. It consisted of some thirty villas surrounding a miniature bay, and grouped at low elevations on the horse-shoe of wooded hills. In addition to the villas were some shops, and a neat hotel; and between the sea and the promenade, by which the bay was bordered, there glittered, with its feet in the waves, a trim little pert casino.

There were signs in all directions that the place had been long neglected; but there were signs also that the neglect was being at last repaired. Windows were being cleaned; *persiennes* were being thrown open; several of the shops were being rapidly stocked with goods. One or two well-dressed people, including some men with golf-clubs, were straying along the roadway. Two open carriages were waiting patiently for hire; and at the door of the hotel stood a *concierge* shining with brass buttons, with whom the manager, in a smart frock coat, was condescending to carry on a conversation.

Of all these matters Lacy took leisurely notice; and then his observation fixed itself on the great Palladian structure, which was looking down in the background, over its terraced

gardens, upon the scene. The manager of the hotel had noticed him as he twice passed by slowly, and at length, on his third appearance, greeted him with a slight bow. It was now about midday, and the action determined Lacy. He mounted the hotel steps, and asked if he could have *déjeuner*. The manager, with obsequious politeness, made the reply of "Certainly"; and whilst the repast was in preparation, Lacy began to talk to him. He had, so he said, spent several years in London; and he presently exhibited his knowledge of the London world by mentioning Mr. Brancepeth, who had engaged him for his present post, and who seemed to be regarded by him as the glass of English fashion. "I knew Mr. Brancepeth also," said Lacy, laughing. The manager bowed with a sudden accession of respect, and Lacy proceeded to ask him what he thought about the prospects of the place.

"Look there, Monsieur," he answered, pointing to the back of the hall, which, as Lacy now saw, was blocked with a pile of luggage. "We have at present," he proceeded, "two guests only, but half the rooms have been taken in advance already. Over there are the boxes of the Marquis and Marchioness of Tregothran, of Sir Flotsam and Lady Flotsam, and of other English families. We expect they will come soon after the arrival of Milor Runcorn."

"And so," exclaimed Lacy, "that is his villa on the hill there! Do you know how soon he is expected?"

"I think," said the manager, "about ten days — fourteen days — from now. I saw M. Martin's *régisseur* — the villa is M. Martin's — yesterday; and he said Milor's sister, Miladi Leyton, was going to arrive first, so as to have the house ready for his reception. It is a great advertisement for St. Hilaire — his presence here. The place, too, has its own attractions, greater than those of Cannes. There is a river, with fishing; there are wild boar in the woods. The forest from here stretches for twenty-five *kilometres*, and one *kilometre* from here is a ground quite splendid for golf. You see, Monsieur, that large villa opposite? That has been taken by the great *richard* — Monsieur Helbeckstein."

The manager's communication was here brought to an end

by the announcement that Lacy's *déjeuner* was served in the *salle-à-manger*. Its excellence augured well for the future of St. Hilaire; and Lacy ate it, half pleased, and half annoyed by the thought that the solitude of the Château des Fleurs would so soon have society for its neighbour. He had hoped to enjoy the company of his expected guests undisturbed. He comforted himself, however, with the thought that St. Hilaire was at present empty; and he and his guests, for a time at least, would have all the neighbourhood to themselves.

One of these guests — one of the three persons referred to in his last night's letter — had a literary gift, of which Lacy was ignorant; and whilst he was looking forward to the pleasure of entertaining her, she had been confiding to paper her own impressions of him, expressing herself in language more formed than her hand-writing.

"I have," she wrote in a beautiful blank volume, bound in vellum and tied with rose-coloured ribbons, "I have conceived a new idea. Already I have a portrait gallery of men whom I consider great. I am going to supplement my portraits of the faces of some of them by attempting myself some short studies of their characters. I have been prompted to make this experiment by a new and interesting experience, with a description of which I shall begin, as a preface to what I am attempting, and as a specimen of it.

"But this preface must have another preface of its own; and this other preface, as I am a woman, will be, naturally, about myself. I start then with asking myself why men interest me more than women do. And my answer to myself is this: They interest me more than women, because they rise higher into the air of life's possibilities, like birds of stronger flight — like eagles that out-soar larks: and new lights, as they mount, seem to shine and glitter on their wings.

"But in saying this, I am speaking with a certain essential reservation. I am speaking of great men only. I am not speaking of the common run of my acquaintance — the men who are typical of the society in which I have been myself brought up. But of these men too I must speak before I can

go farther. I have not as yet seen very much of the world; but still, at my grandmother's house, and occasionally elsewhere, I have seen something of it — in Paris, Rome, and Florence: and there ordinary men of society — principally, no doubt, for my grandparents' sake — have treated me with much attention. They have been well-born, well-bred men, distinguished, even when not handsome, in appearance. They have had a very varied, if not very deep, knowledge of things, which has seemed instinctive in them; and they have had an unerring ease and refinement of manner, which is like a language when talked by a man with a charming voice, and with a perfect accent, even though what he says may hardly be worth saying. But not one of these men has struck me as being personally very interesting.

"In addition, however, to these men, I have known others. I mean great men. I have not only known many — I have, of course, done this by reading about them — but I have actually met a certain number — men who have accomplished great and admirable things. I have met soldiers, statesmen, thinkers, painters, singers; and when I think of what they are doing or have done, I feel my whole life expanding. But now comes my confession. When, instead of thinking about them, I have seen them, I have been disappointed, indeed almost shocked. Admiring what they have done, I have been disappointed in what they are. In respect of what they are, they compare as unfavourably with ordinary men as, in respect of what they do, ordinary men compare with them.

"In the first place, it has seemed to me that their greatness, which I admire so, narrows them. The statesman knows nothing of poetry; the painter knows nothing of politics; the philosopher, whose thought is able to scale the heavens, hardly knows how to come into a drawing-room. The singer who sings like an angel talks like an Italian-warehouseman; and if he presumes to be easy, he is far more offensive than if he is dull. And then, in one way or other, these people are all peculiar. I see them, in my photographs of them, with neckties that make me shudder. Nothing in the world is so underbred as peculiarity: and I have been tempted at times

to feel that of all genius or greatness some element of underbreeding forms a necessary part.

"I am almost ashamed to write this profane feeling down. Still I must do so; for the fact that I have felt it so strongly forms one of the reasons that have prompted me to write down what follows. For a little while ago I had a new experience. I met a man of whom I had often heard — a man great in the sense that he has already done great things, and is capable of doing greater — so at least it is said: but in meeting him I have met with nothing of the disappointment I have just described; and I am going to begin my studies by recording my impressions of *him*.

"When I ask myself why this man does not disappoint me, the answer that comes first to me is this — His manners are as charming as they could be if he had done nothing. But this answer is not satisfactory, and I must put it in another way. His manners and personality are such as to make me forget what he has done, and to see an equivalent, or far more than an equivalent, to it, in himself. What he has done as a soldier, or what he has done in political life, seems only an accidental result of one small part of his character, and a result of which he is hardly conscious. What he has done is interesting, because it makes me think about what he is — what he has thought, and suffered, and hoped for — what he feels to be beautiful and true.

"I can hardly describe the effect which my first conversation with him produced on me. It was an experience which I can compare only to another, utterly and ridiculously unlike it. I mean the excitement which I have known once or twice in ballrooms. The lights, the diamonds, the uniforms, the shining floor, and the fiddles have gone to my nerves or head, and have made me mad to dance. And my partners have danced — how well; and they have some of them had charming voices. I have felt as if I were living in an hour or two stolen from the *Arabian Nights*. But then — then — then — when we have got into the carriage and gone home, the excitement has gone down as quickly as the foam of champagne does in a wineglass; and next day my painting has seemed flat and

dull, till I have forced myself to begin again at it; and then the ball has been forgotten. But when Mr. Lacy talked to me, I felt at the same time all the excitement of the ball, and all the excitement of my painting; and, unlike the foam in the wineglass, this, instead of disappearing, has perpetuated itself like a new vitality given to my whole mind.

"The explanation of this is, I think, very simple. Mr. Lacy's conversation affected me personally as it did, because it made me feel that for him too no less than for me, all the things of my own mental world are realities, not the mere day-dreams of the poor morbid girl. I have never anywhere seen a man with finer manners; but if I met him at a ball, I should never wish that he should dance with me. His presence would make me feel all dancing childish. I would sooner see him in the garden of this Castle of Flowers which he has taken, where there would be time and quiet for thinking.

"Since the first time he called on us, I have never seen him alone: but he has dined with us several times; and once or twice, when he has been talking, he has looked at me for a moment only, as if he were thinking of more than he could say, and as if I could guess what he was thinking of."

The writer a day later added the following paragraph to her "Study" — a "Study" which showed a curious tendency to metamorphise itself into a young lady's diary.

"We are going to stay with him — my grandmother, Madeleine, and myself — at the Château des Fleurs, where that beautiful and unhappy singer lived, who seems, from what Madeleine tells me, to have ended, like a day in summer, in a kind of religious melancholy."

In due time the expected trio arrived; and the Château des Fleurs, under their influence, was turned into a different place. The fanciful beauty of it, which had endeared it to its tenant when he was solitary, was a fanciful beauty still, but it now became warm and human. The very ornaments in the drawing-room looked brighter, like flowers revived by water; and the dinner table had a friendly sparkle beyond what the lamps gave it.

Mrs. St. Germans was a woman who had seen much of the

world. Half French, half English, in her youth she had known London. As the daughter of a diplomatist, she had known other capitals even better; and for many years she had had a house of her own in Florence, which had been a meeting-place of society, Florentian, Russian, and English. She was placidly and equally appreciative of the humorous, the beautiful, and the good; and her slightly cynical amusement at certain of the frailties of her friends, did but glitter like threads of silver on a ground of general excellence, and of genuine affection and anxious thought for her granddaughter.

As for Lady Madeleine, now she was under his own roof, Lacy began to be struck by what was winning in her kindly frankness, as much as he had been interested by the conjectured romance attached to her. He had begun, since his renewed acquaintance with her, to remember something of what she had been before her marriage. She had been one of those girls who create surprise in London, because, in spite of their extreme beauty, they never take rank among the beauties — they never become what is called the fashion. The reason of this in her case — as we should find it to be in many others — was simply that her own life, her inner tastes and interests, had appealed to her far more strongly than the triumphs and excitements of society; and she had entered the social arena with a listlessness — with an indifference to success, which is, unless a girl be a great heiress, certain to secure for her comparative social failure. To win the successes of the moment, the heart must be in the moment: and a girl is hardly likely to hold her own in a ballroom, if, while her eyes are fixed on her partners, her heart is on a Highland hill, or amongst the cypresses in the Boboli gardens. But what diminishes a woman's attractiveness to the world in general, from which she hides her interests, increases her attractiveness to those whom she may happen to select for intimacy. Her mind and her beauty are like a garden which charms those who are familiar to it, all the more because its walks are untrodden by the general public. And to Lacy, Lady Madeleine was an example of this fact. She was a garden enclosed,

from whose leaves the dews had not yet been brushed; and which still was an Eden, though the serpent had once entered it, and though all the air was still sad with his memory. This mixture of sadness and freshness was to him one of her chief charms; and if it had not been for the fact that she was a woman whose religious belief had never been obscured by the smallest inclination to doubt, he could have felt that he and she were two augurs who might laugh at life together. As it was, she excited in him a disposition of intimate frankness, which, unhampered by any of the anxieties or vanities of the would-be lover, was very much what might have been excited in him by a sympathetic foster-sister.

The remaining member of the party — Miss St. Germans — was a striking contrast to her. Just as the nature of the widow, though comparatively still so young, seemed to derive all its light from the past, that of the girl seemed to be glistening in the light of the untried future. Her thoughts were like crystal pools left by the tide at morning, or like buds whose closed petals were just unlocking themselves into flowers.

The three guests, however, had all one feeling in common. They were delighted with their host; they were delighted with their present situation; and when Lacy, on the evening of their arrival, expressed a hope that they would not be dull, and suggested that they might possibly in a day or two find some society at St. Hilaire, they declared their unwillingness even to visit that gay resort, for fear they might encounter acquaintances by whom their seclusion would be disturbed.

The conversation then turned on the late Madame de Villebois; nor was this unnatural, as they were surrounded by memorials of her life and taste: and a copy of *Consuelo* being one of the books in the drawing-room — *Consuelo* of which Madame de Villebois was said to have been herself the heroine, Lacy, at Mrs. St. Germans' suggestion, read them some of its delightful chapters; nor did he stop till a clock, from its bower of Dresden china roses, chimed the hour of eleven, and the little company separated.

The following days of the visit were not less successful than the first. Plans were formed for excursions in the wild neigh-

bouring country, where there was little chance of their meeting any clients of Mr. Samuel Davis. The inland district, lying to the west of the château, was one less known to strangers than any other in the south of France, and at the same time more various in its beauty. They picnicked in woods of chestnut, ash, or ilex, where streams splashed in the bottoms, and mouldering abbeys hid themselves. They came, in the open country, on drowsy, warm hill-villages, capped with feudal castles, and having arcaded streets. They drove through valleys full of secluded sunshine — ovens of vegetation, where from the ruddy clods almond trees were lifting their candelabra of milk-white blossoms; and where rural groups — mothers with blue skirts, and children with poppy-coloured caps — made pictures bright as those in a mediæval missal. They loitered on foot by the banks of willow-fringed streams — streams coloured in the sunshine with their own amber gravel, and painted, where the shadows fell on them, with the ultramarine of the sky. They strayed for a leisurely hour through the little town of St. Tropez, where fishermen, against the walls of old Genoese palaces, bask lazy as the swell that floats and flashes in their harbour; and every day between the palms of the château garden, between the spikes of its aloes, or the glowing globes of its oranges, the life of the electric mornings, or the golden languor of the afternoons, lay laughing or dreaming on the sea, out to its blue horizon.

To all of them this existence was delightful; but it was the delight of the younger of the party which gave to that of the others its peculiar and surprising freshness. The hours, as they shone on her, seemed to produce a rainbow, which threw its transparent colours over each day's experiences for her friends. The garden, when she sat in it sketching, as she often did in the morning, was as much changed by her presence, as a lantern by a lamp inside it. Sometimes she would lie in a hammock, with her hat tipped over her eyes, making in the green shadow a flower-bed of coloured *chiffon*, and would learn by heart a poem by one of her favourite writers; and whenever Lacy came, as he now frequently did, out into the garden to refresh himself during his morning's work of letter-

writing, she would — for she was sure to see him — invite him to inspect her sketch, or else to hear her repeat the verses which she had just been learning. He was at once amused by the eagerness, and much touched by the trust, with which she looked to him for his criticism of her drawings, or his sympathy with her appreciation of her poets. Once, indeed, she showed him some verses written by herself — verses which were written in a pathetically girlish hand, but which yet were graceful in language, and musical and correct in rhythm. There was a good deal of reference in them to some unspecified sorrow; but the thought, to say the least of it, was not particularly clear. Lacy sat down by her, and read the verses over. He praised what he considered their merits, explaining to her what these were; and then patiently inquired of her the meaning which she had intended to express. He suggested several meanings, which her words would perhaps bear; but these she disclaimed, saying, "I had never thought of all that. Whenever I write verses, they somehow are always melancholy. It is so: but I don't know the reason. How kind of you to talk to me about this poor nonsense seriously."

"My dear," he said, "if you are melancholy when you are as old as I am, your difficulty will be not to find a reason, but to say which reason is the strongest."

She looked up at him with the anxiety of a child who sees its father suffering; but there was something of a look in her eye which no child ever gives a father. Then still scanning his face with her young, unabashed scrutiny, she said: "Hear me a poem of Robert Browning's, which I learnt yesterday morning. I learnt it when I was sitting on the rocks below, by the boat-house. Will you take me out on the sea, one day — you and me by ourselves, I mean? I longed to be going yesterday, and to have you to talk to me. There is the poem where the mark is. Now, see if I say it properly."

The poem was *The Englishman in Italy*, one of the writer's earlier lyrics. The girl repeated it with an accentuation correct by instinct; but in many passages she stumbled, and was dissatisfied with her own performance. "There's a lot of it," she said, when she had finished, "which I find I can't re-

member. What I wanted to repeat was necessarily one bit, where the man describes his feelings on the cliff-path by the sea. Listen just once more. These are the lines I mean.

"Oh heaven and the terrible crystal!
No rampart excludes
Your life from the life to be lived
In the blue solitudes —
Oh these mountains, their infinite movement
Still moving with you —
Forever some new head and breast of theirs
Thrusts into view!

I was thinking of all that, as I sat by the sea down there.

"No rampart excludes
Your life from the life to be lived
In the blue solitudes.

That is how I feel, in the life I am leading here, when I look at the blue solitudes, from your boat-house, or from your garden."

"And that is how I feel," he answered, "my dear, when I look at you."

He was a little startled when he realised the words that had slipped from him — all the more so when he saw on the child's cheek a curious agitation of colour, and — he at first thought he must be mistaken — a something as she turned away from him, which dropped glittering from her eyes.

At that moment from above came the sharp reverberations of a gong.

"There's luncheon," he said, in a voice not quite his own.

Without replying, or looking at him, she sprang up from her seat, and ran off in the direction of the house. His eyes followed the white of her flying dress, held at the waist by a ribbon of red silk; and her young figure presently, like a feather blown upwards by the wind, was mounting the steps to one of the balconies of the château, and disappeared.

Lacy, for a minute or two, remained sitting where he was — motionless, his eyes upon the grass. "I must never," he said to himself presently, "speak to her like that again. Ah, my dear, if I could only come over to you — come to you across the Hellespont of the years!"

CHAPTER XVII

One day, whilst matters were proceeding at the château thus, Mrs. Norham had had occasion to pay a visit to Cannes, for the purpose of securing some treatises on moral and social philosophy. One of these was a volume of the works of Comte — a writer from whom Mrs. Norham was translating certain passages for devotional use by persons too wise to believe in a Deity: and as she reached the station at Cannes on her way home, half an hour before her train was due, she sat herself down on a sofa in the first-class waiting-room, where, hearing some well-dressed travellers talking about the tables at Monte Carlo, she proceeded to make herself illustrious by burying herself in the pages of the philosopher.

Mrs. Norham's mind was, however, so many-sided, that she could read philosophy, could make other people see she was reading it, and could attend to other people's conversation at one and the same time; and presently, in her capacity of observer of human nature, she was giving as much of her sarcastic attention to the conversation of two young men, as she was giving of her earnest attention to Comte on the solidarity of mankind. One of the young men was dark, and had a slightly American accent. The other was fair, and spoke excellent and gentlemanly English. Both wore clothes which had not a single crease in them, except such as seemed to have been formed by their first folding.

"But my dear Geoge B.," the fair man was saying to the dark one, "I tell you, you're risking nothing. It's a certainty this is — a mathematical certainty. I don't pretend that you go in for any sudden and enormous winning. That's gambling, if you like. With this system you can't count on getting more — I mean at each *séance* — than twenty per cent. on your capital.

"My little friend and I — with her two hundred and fifty louis to start with — and my two hundred and fifty never had to be called up — with two hundred and fifty louis, each of the ten evenings we've played — we've come off, as regularly as clockwork, with a solid *benéfice* of fifty. Well," the fair man went on, dropping his voice slightly, "we've had for the present to dissolve our little partnership; for a certain person has just come back from Algeria — he's the most awful fellow you ever saw in your life, with his hair *en brosse*, and a frock-coat that makes your flesh creep — so if you'll cut in, instead of her, with another two hundred and fifty, we'll pool our winnings, and although the system is mine, you shall have — old boy — the same profit as I do."

"What's your game?" said the other. "Do you back the *voisins* of zero? Or do you play against a *douze dernier*, or a *douze milieu?* Or is it one of your old dodges with the *transversales?*"

"I suppose you think that," laughed the fair man, "because I've been playing it with a *horizontale*. No, no, no — this is a scientific *martingale*. You can work it, if you like, at *roulette* or the simple chances; but you do it best at *trente et quarante* where the *coups* go quickest. Just look here, George B., you begin to work it like this. You write down the figures in a column. The two terminals are the amount of your first stake. Now here's a card pricked with the play of last night — four reds and a black — a series of six reds — then an *intermittence* — a *refait* — four blacks and a red. Now, you back either colour, and I'll work the system out for you."

"I'll tell you what," said the dark man, "I'll come to the blessed place to-night with you, and act as your *miseur*, and have a look at the thing. But as to adding another capital to yours — " Here his voice sank to a murmur that ended in a sarcastic laugh.

"Why not get it from *him?*" said the fair man, in a confidential mumble. "You know who I mean. He'd be sure to give it to you, if you take him the right way. He ought to do so, at all events; for the money he's got is, by rights, far more yours than his."

"And if I only were my dead half-brother it would be. There's a bull for you. But, my dear chap, I don't know him."

"Leave it to me," said the fair man; "I'll manage it for you. He's living at a place about an hour from here by rail. I've some business to do next week within a mile of his house. I'll see our friend. In the days when he was poorer than I am, I've done a lot for him; and I think he owes me something. I'll make interest with him for you, and get him to fork out handsomely. Of course, George B., if I do this, it's understood that we join our capitals and go in for the system."

Mrs. Norham listened to all this with a feeling of dreamy exasperation, partly caused by her disapproval of gambling, partly by the conviction which the language of the young man forced upon her, that this pursuit, which she disapproved of, not only as a moral teacher, but also — as she told herself — as a complete woman of the world, was, after all, very imperfectly understood by her. Her thoughts, however, were diverted into another channel by a rustle of silk and the stately entrance into the waiting-room of a grey-haired lady, followed by a reverential maid. The lady looked about her for a seat, with a smile which had considerable sweetness in it, but which seemed at the same time to express a belief that she had only to wait for a seat to have one offered to or vacated for her. The maid, who spoke French with an unmistakably English accent, rapidly approached Mrs. Norham, and asked her, with an air of importance, if she would have the kindness to move the books which were on the seat beside her. Mrs. Norham did so; and the maid, returning to her mistress, said, "Here, my lady; I have got you a seat here." The lady sat down, and in a voice as sweet as her smile said to her maid, "You may give me my work, dear Martin. We've fifteen minutes to wait, and I can't bear to be idle." She took, as she spoke, a bag from her maid's hands, and, producing from it a piece of gorgeous embroidery, which seemed like a copy of some portion of an antique ecclesiastical vestment, proceeded to add a petal to a delicate silken rose.

Mrs. Norham stared at her, actually forgetting, as she did

so, the far superior claims of Comte and collective humanity. The lady, however, at first took no more notice of Mrs. Norham than she might have done had Mrs. Norham been some travelling stranger's bonnet-box. Little did she conjecture the piercing and mordant judgments which the lofty thinker at her side was passing upon her secretly. "A true type of her class," Mrs. Norham was saying to herself. "There is something almost comic in her insolent self-sufficiency — in her evident belief in her superiority to the whole work-a-day world, of which she is merely a parasite, and which is absolutely indifferent to her existence — the supreme vulgarity of her pose — of the whole thing — this tawdry trifling with silk and with gold thread. If she only knew what she seems to us of the larger life!"

And Mrs. Norham, as her thoughts reached this point, began putting her books together with a little vindictive emphasis, and fastening round them a strap, to which was attached a label bearing, in printed letters, her own illustrious name.

In the performance of this task, the sharp point of her elbow happened to come into contact with her objectionable neighbour's arm. Her neighbour, however, instead of resenting the attack, seemed to fancy herself the aggressor; and turning on Mrs. Norham a look full of gracious apology, asked her pardon with a courtesy so extreme, that Mrs. Norham was unable to answer with as much *hauteur* as she intended. At the same moment, moreover, she became agreeably anxious that the lady's eyes had caught her name on the label, and had rested on it with an expression of surprise, recognition, and interest. "Ah," thought Mrs. Norham to herself, "it is we who are the true aristocracy." Rising, she made the lady a slight and condescending bow; and the door being now open, she passed out on to the platform.

A moment later the train came drifting in. It was much crowded; and Mrs. Norham's brain, which not all the problems of man's spiritual destiny could bewilder, became painfully agitated by the problem of how she should find a place. She was indeed, if such a word may be applied to her without irreverence, flustered. Whilst in this condition she became

aware of a voice addressing her, and saying to her in a tone melodious with considerate kindness, "In this *coupé* there is nobody but my maid and me. The train is crammed. Perhaps you will get in with us."

Mrs. Norham started, and saw that the person addressing her was none other than the woman whose insolence, insignificance, and vulgarity had been exciting her contempt. She had, however, no time to think about moral consistency; and she not only got into the *coupé* with a feeling of great relief, but was actually surprised into being flattered by this vulgar woman's civility to her.

"Are you going far?" said the lady, when the train had resumed its course.

Mrs. Norham, who doubted whether this inoffensive question might not mean in reality, "How soon shall I be rid of you?" answered with a certain *brusquerie* that she was going to get out at St. Estéphe.

"Indeed," said the lady, pleasantly, "and I get out there, also. And now," she went on, turning on Mrs. Norham her eyes, which still were charming, and which must have once been beautiful, "I am going to ask you a very impertinent question. I have seen in the paper that the greatest of our lady novelists is spending the winter near here; and I saw your name on your label. Am I right in thinking that it is the famous Mrs. Norham to whom I am speaking?"

Mrs. Norham had begun by detecting in the softly flowing syllables of the speaker a note of patronage against which all her nerves protested. The speech, however, thus addressed to her was but half concluded before what she had taken for patronage seemed transformed into the most fitting reverence. Mrs. Norham felt suddenly re-elevated to her own proper position, and enjoyed a satisfaction with herself fuller and more exquisite than any which she remembered to have ever experienced previously.

"I suppose," she said to her companion, blushing with an angelic modesty, "that I am the person of whom you speak so kindly."

"Oh," said the other, "I have read you with so much in-

terest. We were talking your characters over at a country house last week — just before I left England. Some of the cleverest men, and the best judges of the day, were staying there." And she mentioned the names of several Cabinet Ministers, adding the name of the house — a house which proved to be that of a great political Duke, and was even more celebrated than its owner. She repeated to Mrs. Norham several of the things that had been said of her — amongst them the declaration of a literary Cabinet Minister, that since the days of Miss Austen there had been nobody to equal Mrs. Norham.

Mrs. Norham would presently have quite lost her head, if it had not been for this compliment, which seemed to her somewhat inadequate, and restored her to composure like a douche of tepid water. But things were presently going more smoothly than ever; for Mrs. Norham's new acquaintance began expressing a hope that she and Mrs. Norham might before long meet again. Mrs. Norham said that she was living at St. Antoine. "By an odd coincidence," said her companion, "so am I — or near it. My brother, I am sure, would be delighted to make your acquaintance. By the way, you don't know who I am. I ought to introduce myself. My name is written on that." And she handed Mrs. Norham a card, which bore the inscription, "Lady Cornelia Leyton." "And as to my brother," the proprietress of the card continued, "with whom I am staying — I hope you will think that I ought to be very proud of him — he is Lord Runcorn. I don't know if you like his politics, but I think you will like him."

"I am sure," said Mrs. Norham, struggling after a sufficiently cold composure, "to meet Lord Runcorn will be at once an interest and a privilege. My time, at the present moment, is not altogether my own, as I have some poor people here who are more or less dependent on me. I and a friend have secured them a holiday in this beautiful country."

"Well," said Lady Cornelia, "you must give me your address and let me write to you. I have no doubt you are always doing some kind, in addition to some intellectual, work. Martin," she said to her maid, "you must once more give me

my embroidery;" and then turning to Mrs. Norham with a pleasant and companionable smile said, "I, no more than you, can bear to have my hands idle."

"Ah," exclaimed Mrs. Norham, as the embroidery was again produced, and the silken flowers were laid on Lady Cornelia's lap. "Ah," she exclaimed, clasping her hands earnestly, "how lovely — how truly lovely! May I see it nearer? Is this your own design?"

"No," said Lady Cornelia, "it is taken from an old Sicilian chasuble. I've a school for embroidery amongst my villagers."

"And you teach them," said Mrs. Norham, "to create things of beauty like that? Ah, some day I might ask you for one or two hints! I, too, in London, have started, with the help of others, an institution whose sole object is to civilise the uncivilised; and if only I could rouse the latent faculties of my girls, and make them appreciate art by actually turning them into artists! Now, to embroider a rose like that would, to many a poor girl I know, give a far more educating pleasure than to have a dozen flower-pots in her window."

"I wonder," said Lady Cornelia, "that, considering how you work for us with your pen, you can find any time to work for us in other ways."

Mrs. Norham was now in one of her best altitudes. Her upturned eyes were fixed on the ventilator in one of the carriage doors. Her chin was strained forward. Her hands were clasped about her knees. "My pen!" she exclaimed, "I have written simply because I could not help it. But my life-work is in what I do, not write. Perhaps, Lady Cornelia, you may not yet have heard of my — of our — new institution — of Startfield Hall?"

"No," said Lady Cornelia, in a manner so absent that Mrs. Norham came down from her altitudes to see what was the matter. The train was slackening its speed; and Lady Cornelia was looking out of the window. "Is this St. Estéphe?" she was saying, in a voice that might have been addressed either to her maid or to Mrs. Norham. "It is — yes — we are coming to it. It is possible we may find him on the platform."

"Who?" asked Mrs. Norham. But she received no reply;

for the train was by this time stopping at St. Estéphe Station, and the head of her new friend was still at the carriage-window.

Happiness is always uncertain; and the ladies had no sooner descended than that of Mrs. Norham underwent a short eclipse; for Lady Cornelia, who was helped down by her maid, instead of waiting for Mrs. Norham, seemed suddenly to have forgotten her existence. In a few moments her gaze traversed the station; and then, slightly starting, she moved away down the platform with as much haste as was compatible with her weight and dignity. Mrs. Norham's eyes followed her with a certain perplexed resentment; but that feeling presently gave way to curiosity, when she perceived a group of persons to which Lady Cornelia was advancing. One of these she recognised as the *chef de gare*, who was alternately bowing and holding himself unusually upright. A few paces off, by a pile of small articles of luggage, amongst which were conspicuous some red leather despatch-boxes, stood a clean-shaven English valet, and a courier with floating whiskers; whilst close to the *chef de gare*, though in the act of moving away from him, was a man wearing a coat magnificently lined with sable, and a Tyrolese hat with a rakish curl in its brim. This man, who was elderly, was leaning on a young man's arm. The young man was good-looking and had an air of distinction; but for all that Mrs. Norham noticed of him, he might have been ugly, and utterly insignificant. All her attention was taken up by his senior, and this was a man whose appearance was indeed remarkable.

Any one who dispassionately had taken stock of his costume — his varnished boots, the large pattern of his trousers, his braided coat, his scarf, and his large pearl pin — might have been tempted to ask for what elusive reason he failed to look like some over-dressed manager of a circus. The fact remained, however, that he certainly did not do so. In his whole carriage and movements there was a dignity, and a suggestion of power, which the slight stoop and the slowness resulting from age accentuated. The peculiarities of his dress were so dominated and transfigured by his personality, that

they made his appearance, not vulgar, but interesting, and gave a curious touch of mystery to a face deeply lined, whose beard and moustache curled something like an Assyrian king's, and whose luminous eyes had the fierce keenness of an eagle's, combined with the meditative depth of the dreamer's, the philosopher's, and the lover's. Mrs. Norham perceived in a moment that this man was Lord Runcorn.

He and his sister talked together for some moments. Then Mrs. Norham saw the face of Lady Cornelia turned slightly in her own direction; and she realised immediately afterwards, though she had modestly averted her own, that the eyes of Lord Runcorn had followed those of his sister; and that herself, her celebrated self, was forming the subject of their conversation. The seconds went tingling by, and, with an air of deepening abstraction, she began to read and re-read an advertisement of a new restaurant at Monte Carlo, open at all hours, famous for its coffee and oysters, and offering the convenience of *cabinets particuliers* to its patrons. The words *cabinets particuliers* were making a kind of sing-song in her brain, when she heard steps approaching her, and then Lady Cornelia's voice, saying, "My brother, Lord Runcorn, is very anxious to be introduced to you."

Mrs. Norham descended like Athene coming down from Olympus. The great Prime Minister was raising his Tyrolese hat to her, and his hand, in another moment, was pressing and caressing hers, as if the goddess she resembled were not Athene but Aphrodite. There are few women who, whatever their resemblance to the former goddess, are not flattered at finding it mistaken for a resemblance to the latter; and Mrs. Norham became suddenly conscious that she was not only great but fascinating. She was happily ignorant that Lord Runcorn, from long habit, could hardly have shaken hands with even the Witch of Endor without imparting to the ceremony the accumulated tendernesses of a lifetime.

"My brother," said Lady Cornelia, "has only just arrived from Marseilles. I have been here for some days, getting his house ready for him." She then explained to Mrs. Norham that a great French maker of chocolate, who was a political

admirer of her brother, and who owned the villa which he had taken, had placed at his disposal his private saloon-carriage. "See," she said, "it is now being shunted into the station. They have given us a special engine; and we hope you will come on with us."

Mrs. Norham was delighted; and Lady Cornelia moved away. Lord Runcorn at once drew confidentially close to Mrs. Norham, and said, "It is impossible here to plunge into the mysteries of literature; but you must allow me to say, what I have long wished to say to you — that no Englishwoman, not even George Eliot, has ever written our language with such vigour and purity as yourself."

Mrs. Norham was beginning to deprecate this praise, which nevertheless was, she sincerely felt, the first adequate criticism which her work had yet met with, when Lord Runcorn, touching her arm with a sort of reverential intimacy, said, "Here is my secretary, coming to tell us that our train is ready. You will like him. He is something of a poet. I only fear that in this intoxicating air, and with you in the neighbourhood to stimulate him, I shall find him

"Penning a stanza when he should engross."

The saloon-carriage of M. Monier Martin was upholstered in satin, which, with true republican taste, had been enriched with an ornament as strongly as possible suggesting, without actually representing, the royal Crown of France, and all the brackets were in the shape of armorial bearings. When the party had entered, Lord Runcorn drew Mrs. Norham into an inner compartment. "I want," he replied, "to finish what I began saying to you about your style;" and Lady Cornelia and the secretary were left to themselves outside. Whatever were Lord Runcorn's faults, he was the most generous of literary critics; and Mrs. Norham, as he talked, had the delightful experience of discovering more merits in herself than even she herself had suspected. The time had been all too short, when a slackening of the train's speed warned her that they must be nearing St. Antoine, at which station she was to be set down, whilst the others would proceed a few miles further along the

line. Even this moment, however, was not without its compensating sweetness. Lord Runcorn had turned away and was looking out of the window in order to see if they were really about to stop; and Mrs. Norham, in the silence that ensued, caught in the next compartment a few words of Lady Cornelia's, uttered to the secretary, her companion. "I like her ways," she was saying. "She's so original, and yet so perfectly natural. I like that trick she has, when she's carried away by anything, of looking upwards, with her head a little on one side. One sees something like it in old pictures of saints — "

A sudden jolt put an end to Lady Cornelia's utterance. The saloon had come to a standstill by the little platform of St. Antoine; and Mrs. Norham descended, having bidden adieu to her friends, conscious that Lady Cornelia, in a woman's delicate way, appreciated her almost as truly as did her illustrious brother. As she walked from the station to her dwelling, she felt as if she had grown taller, more noble, and, after all, fuller of power. What might not be expected for the cause of altruism and social progress, when she, its leader, after a moment's chance acquaintance with them, had the men and women of the most inaccessible class at her feet!

At dinner that evening Mr. Bousefield asked her if her train had been before its time, as he had seen her entering the house twenty minutes before she had been expected.

"I had a curious meeting," she said, laughing a little, and producing her words with a most scornful air of indifference. "Who should introduce themselves to me but the Prime Minister and his sister; and they civilly brought me with them from St. Estéphe in their special train. He, of course, is a very interesting study; and she is a nice enough woman, not devoid of intelligence. She is interested in our work, and anxious to know more about it."

"Gammon," muttered Mr. Tibbits at the far end of the table.

"Mrs. Norham," said Mrs. Bousefield, as the repast drew to an end, "I hope ye've not suffered from sitting in those draughty foreign railway-carriages. I've just noticed ye holding your head a little on one side. If your neck is stiff, I can give ye a cold compress."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE pleasure Mrs. Norham had received from the praises of Lord Runcorn was not due merely to the fact that he was a Prime Minister and a social magnate. He was more than this. Among the great statesmen of England he stood almost alone in being a poet and a great imaginative writer. As a writer he might perhaps have been greater had he devoted himself less to politics; but a translation of the *Odyssey*, made by him into English verse, and some early poems — fantastic, epigrammatic, and passionate — showed that he had something of the genius, and not merely the temperament, of a poet; whilst his novels, most of them written whilst he was making his way to power, though one or two of the best succeeded his full possession of it — novels in which politics were whimsically blended with romance, and both were interwoven with the mysticism of the mesmerist and the modern medium — possessed a vitality, and evinced a knowledge of life, which had made them part of the classical literature of the century.

The character of this singular man was largely to be explained by his antecedents. He represented a family which, though at once ancient and historical, would have been ruined completely by the infatuated career of his grandfather, if his father, who thought that the best-founded family pride was scarcely satisfactory unless allied with something more material than itself, had not decided to love, to woo, and to marry a dark-eyed young lady of highly romantic aspect, whose father, an Italian, had fixed himself at Nottingham as a stocking-maker, and who settled on his daughter, in gratitude to her for becoming a countess, a fortune then thought enormous, of two hundred thousand pounds. This fortune her husband, with a sagacity which the stocking-maker might have envied,

invested in land adjacent to his alienated family acres, and adjacent also to a village which was beginning to be a manufacturing town. His prescience was rewarded. Ten years went by, and his outlying fields had ceased to bear corn and turnips. They bore instead factories, streets, and chimneys. In another ten years this golden crop had trebled itself, and he thus found himself, in the days before the first Reform Bill, one of the most influential of the magnates of the North of England, besides being one of the shrewdest of the debaters in the House of Lords. His only act of folly was to build for himself a Gothic castle, with groined roofs made up of gilding and stucco, and windows whose glass, in the most glaring of modern colours, exhibited impossible knights, in wildernesses of shields and mottoes.

The present Lord Runcorn was the son of the builder of this edifice. He was a younger son till he reached his thirtieth year, and a son who had quarrelled with his father ever since his twenty-first, when he left Cambridge, encumbered with grotesque debts, eloped with a penniless young lady, and married her at Gretna Green. His father paid his debts, settled on him three hundred a year, and told him that if he wished for anything more, he must work for it. Confident in his own genius, and laughing at his present poverty, the young man became a contributor to a rising weekly review, and began a series of novels which took the world by storm, and enabled himself and his wife to confront and court society from the vantage ground of a house which, although it was small, was in Curzon Street. Some eight years later he succeeded in entering Parliament; and shortly afterwards, the death of his elder brother made him his father's heir, and effected a reconciliation between them. Ultimately, though by slow degrees, his discovery of his political talents led to his subordinating his literary ambition to his political; but his earlier reputation as a poet and a master of romance still clung to him — a result to which his private life had contributed. His marriage, after a year of dreams, began to be a notoriously unhappy one. This was partly due to his own poetic infidelities, but much was due also to the exasperating temper of

his wife, which was such that she ended in transferring to her peccant husband that sympathy of the world which she so loudly claimed for herself. As for him, the charm of his personality increased rather than diminished with age. Nor was he, in the eyes of women, any the less interesting from the fact that his wife and he had been long since legally separated; and his figure seemed, accordingly, very much like that of Byron, to be moving against the background of a picturesquely desolated hearth.

To these characteristics and qualities there was added a certain sense of the grandiose in himself, and a taste for the grandiose in his surroundings. At his home this taste showed itself in the number of new antiquities which he added to those with which Wardour Street had supplied his father. He doubled the number of imaginary coats of arms which he found emblazoned on the doors, or obstructing the daylight in the window-panes; and he supplied his dining-hall with a daïs and a minstrels' gallery, and a set of knightly banners, embroidered in his sister's school. This same taste made his present abode, which he had till now seen only in photographs, appear, in his own estimation, eminently suitable to himself. The situation was really as beautiful as a poet's imagination could have conceived. Its external architecture, admirably copied from Palladio, made Lord Runcorn feel as if he were being welcomed by the spirit of the Italian Renaissance; whilst the marble and gilding of the absurdly over-decorated interior seemed to him as satisfactory as it did to M. Monier Martin himself. It is, however, but fair to him to add that within twelve hours after his arrival the appearance on shelves and elsewhere of a multitude of books he had brought with him gave to the rooms a refinement they had never possessed before.

"Mrs. Tilney," he said to his sister the following day, "Mrs. Tilney and her daughter will come to us next week if they can. Mrs. Tilney has some one in her eye, or I am much mistaken, for the young lady; and the he, I suspect, must at present be nearer the Mediterranean than the Thames."

"Dear Carlotta," said Lady Cornelia, "I'm sure she'll be

always welcome. I often think of her as she was, when she was a bright little brown baby. Why doesn't she try to set Norah's cap at Tristram?"

"She'll have to discover first where Tristram is," said Lord Runcorn. "I suppose, by the way, you know that Mrs. Mordaunt arrives to-morrow?" Lady Cornelia replied with a faint affirmative smile, which had in it a flavour — though the flavour was very slight — of malice and resignation. "It would, I think, interest her," Lord Runcorn continued, "to meet this new Muse, whose acquaintance we have just made — Mrs. Norham. To-day is Monday, — let us ask her to lunch on Wednesday. It will be a new inspiration to her to hear Mrs. Mordaunt sing."

Mrs. Mordaunt was a lady who owed her popularity in London to her plainness, which conciliated other attractive women, coupled with a singular and caressing charm of manner, which, for men and women alike, had all the magnetism of beauty, and secured for her male admirers without alienating female friends — with the exception of one or two who had been known to speak of her as "a cat." She had, moreover, a voice in singing which made a simple ballad seem the voice of every joy that had been lost, or every woman's heart that had been broken. Her husband was a Yorkshire squire — a typical M.F.H.; and she showed her devotion to him by insisting, when, for the sake of her delicate lungs, she wintered in London or abroad, as the case might happen to be, that he should not, in order to be with her, abandon the one chase, and indeed the one pursuit, which he regarded as worthy of a man. Her own latest interest was an enthusiastic appreciation of Lord Runcorn, whose warm and immediate response to it lifted her life to a level it had never before attained, and gave her a *cachet* amongst all her female friends, which a more common attachment could by no possibility have secured for her. So sympathetic was her nature to his, that even the state of her lungs exhibited a tendency to vary in accordance with his movements, and had taken her on more than one occasion to Bournemouth, and on more than one occasion detained her in Grosvenor Place. This year it necessitated a residence in the

south of France; and she now was doubly fortunate, as, owing to Lord Runcorn's kindness, she would not only share a climate with him, but be under the same roof.

Lady Cornelia assented to the suggestion that Mrs. Norham should be invited. An invitation was despatched to her by a groom; and an answer was brought back from her accepting it. Lord Runcorn meanwhile, relieved partially from the cares of State, began, under the influence of the climate, and of his marble halls, to meditate the composition of a new romantic novel, and to try and find out if some beautiful women who admired him had really arrived, as was reported, at the little watering-place at his feet; for the balance of his mind was such that the charms of no one woman — not even of Mrs. Mordaunt — could make him neglect, or be indifferent to, the claims of others.

On the day and at the hour appointed Mrs. Mordaunt arrived, and she and her exquisite tea-gown added a new feature at dinner to the party which had consisted on the previous night only of three persons — Lord Runcorn, his sister, and his secretary. Mrs. Mordaunt, with her velvety voice, bestowed her praises on nearly everything, and did but heighten their value by an occasional interlude of blame. Her blame, indeed, had a peculiar fascination of its own. "I can't allow you," she said to Lord Runcorn at dinner, laying her hand gently as she did so on his wrist, "I can't allow you to keep those dreadful curtains. They are beautiful work, but they don't go with the walls. Cornelia and I will choose some others for you in Cannes; and, if you like, I will make you a present of them."

After dinner, she and Lady Cornelia, any secret jealousies being buried in a tranquil sleep, discussed, enjoyed, and deplored the mistakes and failings of their friends. Mrs. Mordaunt used her probe with a sure but gentle delicacy. She tempered the causticity of a woman with the accents of a sorrowing angel; and it would have been hard to tell from her manner which she thought saddest and most amusing — the elopement of one lady with a rich lover, or the infatuated selection by another of a poor husband. Presently Lord Run-

corn entered, leaning on his secretary's arm. With a delicate adoration in them Mrs. Mordaunt's eyes sought his. "Are we," he asked her gravely, "going to have some music from the one woman in England who knows how to sing?" With a deprecating gesture she moved softly towards the piano; and, Lady Cornelia and the secretary adding their persuasions to Lord Runcorn's, she was soon bringing the tears to their eyes and her own by the passionate and mournful undertones in which she sang to them *Auld Robin Gray*.

As for her — the giver of so many pleasant sensations to others — she was the only person that evening to experience any that were not pleasant. When the singing was over, and the feelings produced by it were evaporating, Lady Cornelia, by way of introducing a new interest, mentioned to Mrs. Mordaunt that she was, on the following day, to meet at luncheon a very distinguished personage — Mrs. Norham, the novelist.

"Ah," said Mrs. Mordaunt, "that will be very charming. Parts of that book of hers I thought were beautiful; but others — well, they jarred on me — they struck me as almost irreverent. Still, my dear, it will be delightful to meet her. Is she ladylike? I suppose not very."

"You should ask my brother," Lady Cornelia answered. "Since he met her the day before yesterday he has done nothing but celebrate her praises."

Lady Cornelia was rewarded for her skill in this delicate reference, by the shade of anxious annoyance which spread itself over her friend's face. "Tell us, Runcorn," she said, "what is your opinion of Mrs. Norham? Mrs. Mordaunt wants to know."

"You are talking of Mrs. Norham, are you?" said Lord Runcorn, unsuspiciously; and he seated himself on a sofa by Mrs. Mordaunt's side. "No one," he said, "would be better able to appreciate her talent than you. It is more than talent — it is genius. And genius, in her case, has been more forbearing than it generally is. It has not robbed her of her virtue — I mean the virtue of simplicity."

"She must then," said Mrs. Mordaunt, sweetly, "be delightful: I am longing to see her. Cornelia dear, it is late. Will

some one ring for a candle for me? I am tired after my journey. I must go and dream about Mrs. Norham."

And this, indeed, was precisely what Mrs. Mordaunt did. She was haunted all night by visions of an underbred woman, with provocative eyes, and a waist absurdly small, who would tempt Lord Runcorn to waste his valuable time in showing a preference for her which she could not possibly feel. "Why," she asked herself, "will men — even the greatest men — be so weak where a woman is concerned?" To this appropriate but difficult question, she was unable to find an answer. She was pleased to discover subsequently that it was not only difficult, but superfluous.

CHAPTER XIX

At noon the following day the gates of the Villa Martin were opened, by a *concierge* in the newest and most glossy of liveries, to admit a hired pony-carriage, the springs of which creaked wearily, but to which a lady who sat upright in it gave the dignity of a triumphal car. It is needless to say that this lady was Mrs. Norham, who felt like a princess of the powers of spiritual progress condescending to pay a visit to the kingdom of outworn privilege. M. Monier Martin had not made his millions for nothing. His approach, which went for half a mile amongst pine-woods, was so wide and so carefully kept that it formed in itself an advertisement of the mastery of this world's goods with which the Chocolat Martin had invested him; and the wondrous tale was taken up in a louder tone by the palms and aloes, which presently took the place of pine trees, and by the gardeners in blue blouses watering emerald turf. Menacing echoes from the platform of Startfield Hall began to reverberate vaguely in Mrs. Norham's mind. She thought of the true leaders of progress, such as Mr. Poulton and Mr. Tibbits, who would soon burst from their obscurity, and make things like this impossible; and then resolving that, of whatever excusable exaggeration men like Mr. Poulton and Mr. Tibbits might be guilty, she, at all events, would be severely cold and judicial, she curbed her feelings so far as to look at the luxurious scene surrounding her merely as a governess might look at a naughty child who, if not quelled by her glance, would affront her with some impertinence. So successful was she in her self-discipline, that when the villa itself burst upon her, with its long white façade — a really beautiful work — she was able to keep herself calm by murmuring, "What wretched taste!" till the doors were opened, even

before the bell had been rung, and her high contempt, as she entered the offensive portals, gave way to a healing, though shy, sense of satisfaction.

But whatever might be her own satisfaction, it was not for a moment comparable to that which, when she entered the drawing-room, was produced by her in the breast of Mrs. Mordaunt. Mrs. Mordaunt's eyes at a glance took her in from head to foot — the somewhat mediæval bonnet, the hair drawn straight from her temples, the square toes of her boots, the self-conscious severity of her deportment. The idea of Mrs. Norham as a rival faded out of her mind instantly, and its place was taken by a spirit of angelically sweet patronage — that patronage which a woman who knows herself to be sympathetic and fascinating is always ready to bestow on one who is only intellectual. Lady Cornelia welcomed her guest, as though taste and high-thinking had, by a kind of freemasonry, made them already intimates; but her welcome was cold in comparison with the exquisite sympathy which expressed itself in the clasp of Mrs. Mordaunt's lingering hand.

"I've so long wished to meet you," Mrs. Mordaunt began cooing. "I think you are a great friend of a great friend of mine — Muriel Carlton — aren't you?"

Mrs. Norham replied, with some unintentional *brusquerie*, that the lady in question was altogether unknown to her.

"Ah, then," said Mrs. Mordaunt, with the music of her manner unruffled, "it must have been that she is so anxious to be a very great friend of yours. She has talked of you to me sometimes for hours together. There is one scene, I should like to tell you, that has always touched her especially." And Mrs. Mordaunt's voice sank to that sisterly whisper in which one lady confides to another the expectations at which Sarah laughed. "It's the scene in which Constance waits for the clergyman in the vestry, resolved to seek comfort by confessing to him the infidelities of her husband."

Mrs. Norham drew back as though a poisonous snake had stung her. "I think," she said, "you must be doing me the honour of making a slight mistake, and attributing to me one of the novels of Mrs. Delia Dickson. No doubt they are

cleverer far than anything I have written: but it so happens that of all modern writers she is the one who in tone and style is the most repug — " Mrs. Norham was going to have said "repugnant," but she changed the word, and said "is the most opposed to me."

"Do you know," replied Mrs. Mordaunt, with one of her most fascinating smiles, "I've been wondering all the time we've been talking, how a book like that of Mrs. Dickson's — which so far as its English goes, might have been written by an ignorant schoolgirl — could have come from the same pen that gave us *The Disinherited*. Lord Runcorn thinks the style of that so finished, that it must have taken you years of work."

The face of the prophetess relaxed; and Mrs. Mordaunt went on to inquire whether Mrs. Norham invented her characters, or took them from real life; whether she found she could work best at night, or in the morning, and whether she was preparing to give the world something more.

Mrs. Norham, who at first was flattered by this enthusiastic catechism, gradually began to experience a sensation wholly new to her. She had a suspicion that Mrs. Mordaunt, though talking up to her intellectually, was talking down to her socially — was treating her, in fact, as a mere professional person. She accordingly began planning some adroit conversational manœuvre which should carry the war into the enemy's country; and after a little hesitation proceeded to put it into execution.

"Do tell me," she said, leaning slightly forward, "where one can get sleeve-links — beautiful sleeve-links like that?"

"These," said Mrs. Mordaunt, with a sigh, "were given me by a dear old great-aunt of mine. They were a present to her from Marie Antoinette."

Mrs. Norham felt that her onslaught had been somehow far from successful; but Lady Cornelia, who had left the room whilst the preceding conversation was in progress, returned fortunately at this precise moment, and she had hardly done so when two great folding doors were simultaneously thrown open, and Lord Runcorn made his entry. His black hair was

curling; his luminous eyes flashed; he walked with his stateliest stoop; and his coat was of black velvet.

He made amends to Mrs. Norham for all that had gone before by greeting her with as much courtly *empressement* as he could have manifested had she been a princess, or any other of those kindred beings whom she despised; and he seated himself on a low chair opposite to her in an attitude of grave devotion, indolently folding over his knees his beautifully shaped hands.

"You have been," he said, "in the company of one of your most appreciative admirers. Otherwise I should have felt more need to apologise for my late appearance. The fact is, I have been detained by some sordid political business, which is at its best merely the scaffolding of life. I am now escaping to you, whose interests are in life itself. I congratulate you on having come to the land of imagination and poetry. After luncheon I must show you this house and gardens. Can anything," he continued, as he waved his hand towards the window, "be lovelier than that expanse of sea, shining between those marble vases, whose outlines it seems to chisel? Were it possible for me to choose my own career over again, I would choose the life which could be lived in a Mediterranean villa, sooner than that which imprisons me in the air of Downing Street." Whilst making these observations he kept looking at Mrs. Norham, as though sure that a woman like herself would appreciate their profound suggestiveness. "The politician," he resumed, "even in his greatest moments, is merely solving some problem which, as soon as it is solved, is meaningless. The poet deals — and we novelists may call ourselves poets — with problems which are never old, however often we solve them, and which each year of our lives we are asking to be solved anew. Horace and Virgil," said Lord Runcorn, rising, and moving meditatively towards the window, though still talking at Mrs. Norham — "Horace and Virgil are our familiar friends to-day, whilst Consuls and Triumvirs are remembered only by undergraduates, and remembered by them only till they have deposited their memories on their examination papers."

Mrs. Norham, though she was more accustomed to be the dispenser than the recipient of aphorisms, was nevertheless much flattered by Lord Runcorn's intellectual attentions, and all the more so because she felt that she was having social worship in the eyes of one who just now had accidentally got the better of her. "He values my books," she said to herself, "because they are a part of me — not me because I happen to have written my books."

This sustaining conviction was subtly permeating her mind, and giving added vitality to her sense of herself as a social and religious leader, when luncheon was announced, and Lord Runcorn, in indolent accents, suggested that they and their philosophy should make their way to the dining-room.

Mrs. Norham, who had done much to elevate her earnest disciples by her inculcation of plain living as an adjunct to high thinking, was affected by the niceties of Lord Runcorn's epicurean board in a manner which she had never anticipated. Instead of being conscious of a disapproval, which should gnaw at her like the Spartan's fox, she found herself becoming unexpectedly and irresistibly genteel; so much so, that in looking for her napkin, which had furtively left her knees, she explained the situation to Lord Runcorn by saying that "she had dropped her *serviette;*" and accounted for her rejection of a nice little jam tart by confiding to Lady Cornelia that "she never touched *patisserie.*"

Her mood being such, she was gratified by the turn of the conversation, which, without losing altogether its philosophic flavour, became largely personal, and gave Mrs. Norham the impression that the representatives of out-worn privilege were recognising her as one of themselves. Indeed, when Mrs. Mordaunt, at the conclusion of some trifling anecdote, said to her, "I'm afraid you must think us all very frivolous," Mrs. Norham, who had hitherto denounced personal conversation as the surest sign of moral and intellectual emptiness, felt inclined to resent the suggestion with all the emphasis at her command, and to declare that gossip was her own favourite recreation. Her host, however, saved her that trouble by sententiously declaring that "gossip, no less than history, is

philosophy teaching us by example." "It is only frivolous," he said, "to people who can learn nothing from it; and history, to the same kind of people, only escapes being frivolous by being meaningless. For instance," he went on, turning directly to Mrs. Norham, "that subject which you and I were discussing just now — a subject which interests you and me particularly — the relative merits of the political life and the literary — if we want to understand these, we naturally refer, in our minds, to individuals who have chosen or rejected one life or the other. The individuals from whom we shall learn most are those whom we ourselves know; and when we talk about them and compare them, what is that but gossip?"

Mrs. Norham, who had been somewhat silent hitherto, now felt that she had found an appropriate opening. "I have been wishing," she said, "to ask Lord Runcorn if he thinks that the life of the politician is the only kind of practical life that we can put in contrast to the literary. Does he not recognise," she continued with a note of subtle irony, "those unclassified social activities, which the most careless of us cannot ignore — for they are rife on every side of us — and which some think are destined to change the entire configuration of society?"

Lord Runcorn, in spite of his literary admiration for Mrs. Norham, had formed no distinct idea of what her principles as a reformer were. Her subtle irony was therefore wholly lost on him; and instead of inviting her to prophesy a social revolution, he hastened to reassure her by informing her that she had no reason to fear one. "The idea," he said, "of a social dispensation that shall be radically different from the present has always been peculiar to persons unable to succeed under any. The typical social revolutionists of the modern world are essentially men of the lower middle classes, who are fevered with ambitions out of all proportion to their powers. Such men, as history shows, are capable of doing much mischief, and the statesman is bound to watch them. The idea that a socialistic society is possible is an idea that has to be reckoned with. Such a society, conceived as an actuality, is a mere chimera."

Mrs. Norham was rallying her forces to combat these atrocious views, and was burning to unfurl the standard of Startfield Hall on the luncheon table, when again her opportunity was taken from her, and this time by Mrs. Mordaunt, who asked Lord Runcorn if he did not recognise the soldier as a man of action equal in importance to the politician.

"Well," said Lord Runcorn, "let us consider that question. Let us take the greatest soldiers the world has known. Let us take the Cæsars, the Wellingtons, the Napoleons. Men like these are either politicians themselves, or else they affect history by being the politician's tools. The general is at the back of the army; but we have, at the back of the general, men who, as often as not, have never known the smell of powder. Politics, therefore, may be taken as a type of action generally, just as literature stands, not only for the writing of books, but for all that life of reflection, speculation, and feeling of which the writing of books is the expression."

"Poets," said Mrs. Norham, "have often politicians for heroes."

"Yes," replied Lord Runcorn; "but when the poet deals with the fortunes of a politician, he treats politics merely as one form of emotion. What interest do we take in the fortunes of Shakespeare's Cæsar, except in so far as they affected Cæsar himself? Politics and literature," he continued — "these are the two masters. Happy the man who is able to serve both."

Mrs. Mordaunt whispered, "You are able."

"Since we are talking," he replied, "of gossip being philosophy teaching by example, I may tell you of one person who has lately shown that he is *not* able. He is some one," he said, turning to Mrs. Norham, "whom we all of us know, or know about. The life of politics has been offered to him — has been made easy for him. He enjoys every talent and circumstance that would have made his career brilliant; and he has given this life up because the other life has a more potent seduction for him. The man I mean, Mrs. Norham, is my nephew, Tristram Lacy, who refused the post in Egypt which, as it will be in the papers to-morrow, I may tell you has just been accepted by Sir John Chandler Maitland."

"Of course," said Mrs. Mordaunt, with a smile of secret intelligence; "Tristram Lacy — yes. How much you must be disappointed! He's so handsome, I think. But I never saw anybody who looked so bored with everything."

"That," said Lord Runcorn, "is just what makes him interesting. To be bored with life is in most cases a sign of weakness. It is like an indifference to horsemanship in a man who cannot ride. But in him it arises from quite another cause. He is naturally a man of action, and would like to do something great: but he suffers from the intellectual disease of finding nothing worth doing."

"Poor man," said Mrs. Norham, with a sarcastic shrug of the shoulders.

"No one," continued Lord Runcorn, "ever had less to sour him. Women have been devoted to him — women married and unmarried."

"I wish," said Lady Cornelia, "he would devote himself to one married woman more; and that this time she might be his wife."

"There is no devotion," said Lord Runcorn, not much attending to this — "there is no devotion so disinterested as that of a married woman. She runs the risk of losing by it everything except her lover, and," he added in a sardonic undertone, "generally him into the bargain."

"Hush," said Mrs. Mordaunt, with a whisper of intimate reproof, and a momentary glance in the direction of Mrs. Norham. Mrs. Norham was conscious of the glance. She had heard the reproof also; and just as a little while ago Mrs. Mordaunt's unasked solicitude for her had almost converted her into an enthusiastic defender of gossip, so on the present occasion it filled her with a momentary desire to demonstrate that she could hold her own with anybody in bandying wit and wisdom at the expense of the marital tie. She paused, however, before proceeding to this new trial of her powers; and Mrs. Mordaunt, continuing her misplaced kindness, had given meanwhile a new turn to the conversation by saying, "And your fascinating nephew — what has become of him now?"

"That," said Lord Runcorn, "I am quite unable to tell you;

and for all we know it may be safer not to inquire. I suppose, Cornelia, we may as well have coffee on the terrace; and then, if Mrs. Norham and Mrs. Mordaunt are not indisposed to walk, I will show them the gardens, which I have only half seen myself."

"Let us go," said Mrs. Mordaunt, "by the path which we noticed after breakfast, which takes one through the woods, along the side of that enchanting hill."

Lord Runcorn's eyes intimated that a word from Mrs. Mordaunt was a command; so he, she, and Mrs. Norham presently set out in the direction indicated. The path through the sloping woods did credit to their expectations of its beauty, though the minds of the two ladies were a little distracted from the enjoyment of it by a desire on the part of each to put the other in her right place. At last, however, they came to a prospect of sea and violet mountains so brilliant in its beauty that both of them burst into cries of admiration, and admitted that Lord Runcorn expressed nothing but their own sentiments when he said that for living the life which a scene like that suggested, the world of public life and its prizes might well be lost. He had hardly finished speaking when a sudden turn in the path brought them in sight of a tall and graceful woman, whose carriage, whose dress, and whose parasol overcame Mrs. Mordaunt with a pang of sympathetic, yet almost envious, curiosity. She also was enjoying the sea and mountains; and beyond her, nearly hidden by her, was a companion, who seemed to be similarly occupied. The attitude of the two, and the fact that they seemed almost silent, suggested an intimacy curiously in keeping with the scene. The sound, however, of the others approaching presently made them turn; and as they did so, Mrs. Norham half audibly ejaculated, "Mr. Brandon!" Then there followed from Lord Runcorn exclamations of amused surprise; and presently Mrs. Norham was bewildered by hearing her old acquaintance introduced to her, not as Mr. Brandon, but Mr. Tristram Lacy.

"I ought," he said to her, laughing, and not in the least abashed, "to apologise for having introduced myself before to you by one of my names only."

Mrs. Norham was considering what answer she would deign to make, when she was saved the trouble of coming to any decision by the fact that Lacy, together with his fair companion, were incontinently monopolised by Lord Runcorn and Mrs. Mordaunt, and Mrs. Norham for the moment was altogether forgotten. All she could do was to look on at the group, and she did this with a feeling of severe, not to say angry, detachment, which whispered to her how superior was her conception of life to theirs. She heard Lacy's companion addressed by Mrs. Mordaunt as Lady Madeleine. She saw Lord Runcorn holding the delicate hand of this stranger in a manner which made Mrs. Mordaunt regard it with uneasy attention. She heard Lacy and Lady Madeleine both being plied with a variety of laughing questions; and then, not knowing precisely what had happened, she saw the whole party preparing themselves to go forward. Mrs. Norham was beginning to sulk violently, and was asking herself, "Is it credible that they will actually go on without me? If they do I shall certainly not follow them" — when Mrs. Mordaunt, with the sweetest smile in the world, turned to her and said, "Dear Mrs. Norham, I don't know if you are much of a walker, but it's not much farther that we are going. It's to Mr. Lacy's house. I am sure you would like to see it. Lord Runcorn, or Mr. Lacy, if you're tired, will give you an arm. I and Lady Madeleine Seaton are going to walk on in front."

Having thus separated Lord Runcorn from the only rival whom she feared, Mrs. Mordaunt claimed her companion, and set out with such unusual briskness that Lord Runcorn's eyes were very soon deprived of even a back view of Lady Madeleine's well-made dress, and Mrs. Norham was left with the two gentlemen to herself. She was conciliated by this arrangement, which she took for a compliment to herself, and which she welcomed also as affording her a good opportunity of exhibiting herself to Mr. Lacy as the admired friend of his uncle. She had ample time given her to mature her plans; for, during the first five minutes of their progress, Lord Runcorn never ceased to praise Lady Madeleine Seaton, and to ask Lacy questions with regard to her — where he had met her, when

she had come to stay with him, and what was her precise connection with his other guests, the St. Germans. This discourse, however, came to an end, and then Lord Runcorn began in his best manner to hold forth on the elevating influence of such scenery as that which now surrounded them, shutting them out, as it did, with its woods and mountains, together with its concealed fences, from all those sounds and activities of the great human multitude, which, according to Mrs. Norham's philosophy, were the only things worth thinking about. Presently, with a somewhat pompous and yet beautiful modulation of his voice, he summed up his meaning, as they were entering Lacy's grounds, by repeating the opening lines of a well-known sonnet of Wordsworth's —

> "There are two voices — one is of the sea,
> And one is of the mountains — both divine.
> They were thy chosen music, Liberty."

"It is such sublime voices," he went on, "that we can listen to in these gorgeous solitudes."

"Yes," retorted Mrs. Norham; "but it behoves us not to forget that such voices are sublime only because they speak to us about the lot of crowds."

Mrs. Norham, though not alluringly beautiful, was at all events female; and actuated partly by an impulse of ineradicable gallantry, partly by an effusive desire to pay homage to literary merit, Lord Runcorn seized her hand. "That is a truth," he said, "I was forgetting, but ought not to have forgotten. I could forget many more, and ones of even greater importance, for the pleasure of having them pointed out to me by Mrs. Norham."

Mrs. Norham was reddening and hesitating, as if doubtful what to reply, when, pointing to his favourite walk, which was now lying before them, Lacy said, "It is here that my own grounds begin."

"My dear Tristram," exclaimed Lord Runcorn, striking his stick in the ground, and looking down the vista with solemn and admiring eyes, "have you too, like myself, discovered some fairy palace?"

"You will, perhaps, think that it is more nearly like a tea-garden," said Lacy, when they reached the end of the long walk, and saw below them the artificial amphitheatre of gardens, with their spouting fountains, the grottoes, balustrades, and statues, and, rising above them, the château, embowered in creepers, with gilded vanes on its turrets, and gay awnings at its windows. Mrs. Norham had expected nothing of this kind. Her face grew solemn, and by the time she had entered the house each glance she cast at Lacy was a kind of unspoken sermon. The two ladies who had preceded them were already seated in the drawing-room, with Mrs. St. Germans between them, looking like an old French miniature, and before them a cluster of the daintiest teacups imaginable. She and Lord Runcorn, who had known each other in old days, met with mutual recognitions, which were like the meeting of two waters. Lord Runcorn, for whose taste few things were too ornate, thought the Château des Fleurs more fascinating even than the Villa Martin, and much more exciting than the voices of the sea and mountains. He wandered about the rooms inspecting ornaments and pictures, now calling Mrs. Mordaunt to his side, now Lady Madeleine, and now appealing with grave deference to Mrs. St. Germans, till he finally learnt who Madame de Villebois had been, when at once he proceeded to electrify all his audience by declaring that in his youth he had known her intimately, and had offered her the incense of a boy's poetic passion. Then, in the midst of this, there glided into the room a new feminine something — dazzling, dainty, irresolute — a figure with a white hat, and cheeks like a pink begonia, the figure of Estelle St. Germans. Mrs. Mordaunt, when she saw her, gave a gasp of sympathetic admiration; and Lord Runcorn had eyes no longer for miniatures or Sèvres china. For the first time in her life Mrs. Norham felt utterly bewildered, and all the conversation, all the movement round her, became for her like a scene in a play, the plot of which she could not follow, and in which, what was worse, she herself could play no part. In especial, the beauty of Miss St. Germans, her mixture of simplicity and *aplomb*, were like nothing Mrs. Norham had ever seen before; and as she

watched Lacy moving in this unfamiliar *milieu*, addressed by these women with intimate inflections of the voice, and constantly followed by the eyes of the young girl, her anger with him grew more acute, and not her anger only, but her desire to dominate his will and personality with her own. These feelings, and the awkwardness which accompanied them, reached their climax, when she suddenly saw this provokingly dainty figure standing by Lacy's chair, with her hands resting on the back of it, her face bent down to whisper something in his ear, and her eyes looking furtively in Mrs. Norham's own direction. Mrs. Norham's cheeks flamed. The girl's attitude, she told herself, was indecent — and worse, the little impudent minx was presuming to laugh at *her!* The thought was becoming intolerable, when Lacy, coming towards her, said, "Miss St. Germans has a great request to make of you. She wants to know if you would write your name in her album. She has your picture in it already. Her book is in the next room."

This act of childish homage acted on Mrs. Norham like *sal volatile*. It not only restored her to her self-importance, but at the moment she felt grateful for it, and gladly went off under the guidance of her petitioner. When she returned, she found a carriage had been ordered which would take Mrs. Mordaunt and presumably Lord Runcorn back; and Lacy suggested that Mrs. Norham's pony-chair should be sent on to the château, in order to pick her up. "Pray," said Mrs. Norham, "let it be sent straight back to St. Antoine. I should prefer to walk." "Then let me," said Lacy, "come with you."

She assented with an ill grace, but with considerable inward satisfaction. She saw at last the exact opportunity she had been coveting.

"Well, Mr. Lacy, or Mr. Brandon," she began, when they had left the house together, "for I hardly know by which name to call you — " And she paused abruptly, as if she had uttered a kind of challenge.

Lacy, however, only laughed. "I have," he answered, "an equal right to both."

"After all," said Mrs. Norham, "what does a name matter? I know now not only what you are called, but what you are. I know the life you lead, the mental atmosphere you breathe; and I cease to wonder at your failure to find happiness in the struggle to secure the good things of life for others. I cease to wonder at your doubting if any good things exist. I don't know if you object to my speaking plainly."

"Not in the least," he answered. "Your plain speaking interests me."

"Let me tell you, then," Mrs. Norham resumed, "that you despair of life in your own case, and consequently in the case of others, because you live shut off from all functional activity. Your life — and, if you will let me say so, the life of those surrounding you — no more resembles the life proper for a human being than the foot of a Chinese woman resembles a foot as it ought to be. You have even rejected — so your uncle tells me — that poor and commonplace imitation of true social duty which is commonly called serving your country in a high public capacity. How is it possible that you can understand social duty in its more important forms, the practice of which constitutes the pure religion of altruism?"

"Well," said Lacy, pausing to open the gilded gates through which they passed from the grounds of the château into the public road, "do you think you could tell me what I must do to be saved?"

Mrs. Norham, with her umbrella, struck viciously at the gilded iron-work. "You must," she said, "break through bars like these. It may be pardoned in men like your uncle — men of an elder generation — that they should continue to live surrounded by an anti-social luxury, and a ritual of pomp which is not only anti-social, but — forgive me for saying so — is at this time of day as absurd as would be the wearing of armour. Men like him — women like your aunt — are charming, not because of these surroundings, but in spite of them. They are like children so pretty that no dressing-up can spoil them. But to you — you who belong by rights to the new generation of progress — my counsel of perfection is this: learn to prize nothing, to use nothing, to enjoy nothing — I

will not say which *is* not enjoyed by all men — but which may not conceivably be enjoyed by all men some day. Mr. Lacy," said Mrs. Norham, solemnly, "if you can tear yourself away for an hour from this false and lifeless life in which you live, will you come one evening to us at St. Antoine, and be present at a kind of service which we and our friends hold together once a fortnight? You will then be in vitalising contact with the thoughts, the feelings, and the classes that really move the world. At all events, I will write you a line when our next meeting is arranged; and you can take what I offer you, or leave it, as you see fit. I can only add that the true treasure of life is before you. I — we — put it before your eyes. If you do not find it and take it, it is your own fault."

CHAPTER XX

Such is the perversity of the unregenerate human heart, that Lacy, when he returned to his friends, felt that they and the Château des Fleurs had an added value in his eyes on account of Mrs. Norham's denunciation of them; and, indeed, the happy mood which was secretly developing itself within him was mainly due to a certain condition of things by the outer signs of which Mrs. Norham had been specially piqued.

A calmer observer than she might have seen much more than she did in the attitude of Miss St. Germans as she had stood by Lacy's chair, and had stooped unabashed to whisper her secret in his ear. It was an attitude that by this time had come to be frequent and natural with her. Often, when she showed him her sketches, she would find him sitting in his library, and she would stand and bend over him whilst he examined and discussed her work. In this respect her conduct had an aspect that was entirely childish; but in her clinging to his neighbourhood, even in her tendency to lean slightly against the chair by which she stood, an acute observer might have detected that the ways and the consciousness of childhood were fostering, by hiding, a feeling with which a girl's childhood ends. And with regard to him, too, an acute observer might have argued that a man of his age, under such circumstances, would never have looked so young and so well pleased if he had not himself something of the feeling which he had unintentionally roused. That neither of them knew their condition would have been no proof that it was not theirs; for many people find that love is never so happy as it is when it is alive and growing, but does not yet know its own name.

To Lacy, at all events, if that name was what his feelings

deserved, they had not as yet shown themselves to him in their true character. They presented themselves to him rather as an extraordinary revival of his youth, by sympathy with this child for whom he acknowledged an affectionate friendship. The cares and doubts of maturer life fell from him, as they do from grown-up people who join in the games of children. The shining freshness of her appreciations flashed their light upon his. The murmuring sea renewed for him its old prophecies. The chalice of every flower became a Pandora's box, its scents or its dews being the disguised spirit of hope. All life was like a novel which he had read through and discarded, but which he had now taken up again, and which, reading it aloud to her, was once more as fresh as he found the chapters of *Consuelo*, with which he still continued to entertain his guests in the evening.

The effect thus produced on him was all the deeper, and was deprived of the unreality of the ordinary fool's paradise by the fact that it did not distract him from the calls of prosaic business; and it deepened, instead of diminishing, the pleasure he felt in the graver company of Lady Madeleine Seaton. For without ever alluding to his present condition of happiness, she seemed to him to be aware of it, and to encourage his happiness by her sympathy.

He had never been aware of this fact so keenly as he was on the morning that succeeded Mrs. Norham's visit. It was Sunday; and he proposed to Lady Madeleine to walk with her when she went to Mass. He had, since she had been staying with him, made a new discovery. In the forest near the château, beyond the public road, there was a little chapel built by Madame de Villebois, at which Mass was said every alternate Sunday. It was to be said there this morning, and he and Lady Madeleine set out together. He had never forgotten his meeting with her in that other chapel — in a forest also — at St. Laurent; and just as Miss St. Germans gave him back something of his lost youth, so did Lady Madeleine give him back something of his lost religion. She did not do this, so far as he was himself aware, by turning his mind towards any object of religious worship; but her influence invested

the passions and vicissitudes of life with something of the mysterious light which religious belief throws on them; and as he stood or knelt by her side that morning, he was conscious of this in a new way. This chapel was, to his mind, far less devotional than the other. It was a specimen of the smartest Gothic which a modern architect could produce; and the brightest object visible, in its artificial twilight, was Madame de Villebois in alabaster, recumbent on her own tomb. But these exotic fineries were toned down by the simplicity of the primitive worshippers; and Lacy's thoughts, as before, on a similar occasion, though not occupied with the service, were in some measure in tune with it.

They dwelt now, for the first time, on a change which had, during his guests' stay with him, been taking place in his own disposition. He recognised that, in all the many discussions he had had with them, the only opinions he had himself expressed had been those which he most sincerely respected, or most sincerely wished might be his own. He heard himself condemning things which for years he had been accustomed to condone, and treating with reverence scruples which had long seemed meaningless to him. His mind became like a church which echoed only to noble music; and he could hardly believe that he was really the same man who so short a time ago could hardly think a thought which was not stained or warped by some bitter or desponding spirit. So he seemed to himself, viewed from those mental elevations to which he had been wafted by the rhythm of the worship and the vapours from the clanking thurible; and when he emerged into the light of day again, and found his companion at his side, his exaltation of spirits remained, though it somewhat changed its character.

As he and Lady Madeleine went home together through the pine-wood, as he noticed her graceful walk, her eyes that seemed charged with memories, and that delicate miracle of curves and flowers — her hat — his thoughts went back to a long-past love-affair of his own — the one that had ploughed the most painful furrow in his memory. It had begun on the Riviera; and, as Lady Tregothran would have said of it, the

heroine of it had been "the inevitable married woman." He thought of his own passion that had idealised and redeemed the situation; and the efforts he made, as the situation became more difficult, to prop up its threatened dignity by idealising it yet more completely; and he thought of how he had gone through the shadows with a pathway of sunshine in his heart. He thought, moreover, of the way in which this woman had cast him off; of his own ambitions which he had hoped would make up for the loss of her; of the way in which these had failed him almost as completely as she had; and, finally, of how the memory of her had become almost degrading to him, precisely because it had utterly lost its sting.

But now these thoughts came back to him like some pungent aroma from the soil, which, though they saddened him a little, yet stimulated him, and mixed themselves with his consciousness of the companionship of Lady Madeleine, whose experiences he vaguely felt must have had some resemblance to his own. As he walked with her, all his senses were like an orchestra whose different instruments were softly playing their accompaniment to this agitation of his mind. There was the blue of the sky shining between the dark foliage, the elastic spring of the pine-needles beneath his feet, the remembered fumes of the incense he had just been breathing, the thrilling touch of the clear forest air, and the faint and delicate scent from the pocket-handkerchief of his companion.

Presently he said to her, "This is the most enchanting country in the world."

"And yet," she answered, "when I first met you here, it did not seem to have put you in the very best of spirits. I think you are happier now. Surely, as people say, you have everything that can make you happy. If any one ought to be happy, you ought to be."

"Happiness," he said, "can never be independent of circumstances; but the best of circumstances do not create happiness. The kingdom of happiness, like the kingdom of God, is within us. I suppose," he continued, "that a man's keenest happiness is simply and permanently to idealise some woman and to marry her. For in spite of all people may say,

who fancy that they know the world, no one who has tasted to its dregs a union that is not legitimate, can believe that complete happiness is possible in any *liaison* which marriage does not confirm. It is made impossible, in the long run, by the mere conditions of the society round us."

"Yes," she said, "women know that quite as well as men. They have more temptation to find it out by experience. Do men ever suffer, in our class, as the almost portionless girls do, to whom marriage offers the sole means of subsistence; and who, in nine cases out of ten, must, if they are true to their husbands, sacrifice all the poetry of life, and if they are not true, all its peace?"

"Yes," said Lacy, "some men suffer more. Look at me, now. I was sufficiently well born. I was brought up in the heart of what is called the world. Within limits, I was successful, and made much of; and I never was so poor that I hadn't a good coat to my back, and a servant to varnish my boots. But there my resources ended. And as for men such as I was, however superficially prosperous, there is one relation in life — and that relation is the most important — in which they find themselves to be pariahs. That relation is marriage. Every form of intimacy is open to them except that."

"Well," said Lady Madeleine, adopting a line of reply which to a man, though not to a woman, might perhaps have seemed inconsequent, "you are, at all events, in a different position now."

"Yes," he replied, "that is true enough. You mean, of course, that I am rich now. Well, to many men who have been poor, wealth may come like a non-diabolic Mephistopheles, offering them the enchanted broth that is to make them young again. But it must find them wiser or more ignorant, when it comes to them, than it has found me. I begin with my new riches, when Faust in his new youth ended. I had found life out before I had the golden key to it. I am a Faust who cannot even be taken in by a Marguerite."

"Do you," said his companion, "really mean that? For my part, I think there's a Marguerite not very far off, who might easily find a soft place in your heart."

"Do you mean," said Lacy, "that child? My dear friend, her presence in the house is delightful, to you, I think, no less than to me. It is like water in a landscape. And for me — do you know what her society is to me? It is a kind of haschish, which gives me back all my youth — its interests, its illusions, its high spirits — in a dream. But I know it to be a dream, all the same. Do not let us put it to flight by talking about it. If the girl bears any relation to me at all, she is my child or my little sister. By the way," he went on, abruptly changing the subject, "that reminds me. I am glad to gather from what Mrs. St. Germans says, that you will not be in a hurry to go back to St. Laurent."

The subject they were just discussing was thus for the time closed, though it was destined to be opened again at no very distant period; and Lacy, though it had not been altogether disagreeable to him, had it put out of his head completely during the course of the afternoon, by two incidents of a surprising but essentially unromantic character.

CHAPTER XXI

Mrs. St. Germans and her granddaughter had gone in the afternoon to St. Hilaire to attend the English service, for the weekly performance of which, in the public *salon* of the hotel, Mr. Sam Davis, zealous for the souls of the visitors, had engaged, through the Poodle, a very personable English clergyman. Lacy, meanwhile, was occupied with some business in his library, when the door was abruptly opened, and a servant announced a visitor. Lacy started, looked up, and before him stood the Poodle.

Lacy rose to greet him with a face that was grave rather than cordial, nor was this certainly to be wondered at. The Poodle, though he could find money for giving dinners to the objects of his affection, had made no attempt to repay the five thousand francs, which he had, with such solemn protestations, borrowed for three days only; nor even the other sum which had been lent him by his friend in London. He perceived at a glance the expression of his friend's face. At such observations nobody could be quicker than he; and his own expression and demeanour were likewise different from their wont. He was indeed as smart as ever, or, if possible, smarter; for his hands were adorned with one or two new rings, his linen shone with the luminous glaze of porcelain, and his person exhaled a fragrance of Ess bouquet. But there was no eager laughter. There was no flourishing of his stick. He was a little flushed; there was a slight frown on his forehead; and he stood there like injured innocence, expecting to be injured further, and yet magnanimously restraining the reproaches it was his right to utter.

Matters stood like this for a few seconds only. Lacy then forced a smile, pushed a chair towards him, and began, as he did so, an attempt at conversation, by saying, "Since I saw

you last, your operations have been indeed successful. I suppose you are at St. Hilaire, busy with your new watering-place, which seems, like heaven and earth, to have been created in six days."

To this, however, the Poodle made no reply. He remained standing, and his eyes, as he now fixed them on Lacy, seemed slowly to be protruded farther and farther out of his eyelids, as if pushed forward by the weight of repressed feelings behind them. At last, thrusting his hand into an inner pocket of his coat, he pulled out a leather case, and took from it, with trembling fingers, a number of bank-notes, which he laid down emphatically on a table.

"There, old boy," he said at last, his voice halting with emotion, "now I can look you in the face again! If it had not been that I've tried your patience too long already, I'd have asked you to help me for just a few weeks longer. But that would be too much to expect. Old boy, I must tell you I quite understood that letter of yours. I could see just what you felt; and, by Jove, I wasn't surprised at it. You didn't trust me. That was the long and the short of it; and I said to myself, 'Before another fortnight's out, he shall have his own again, if I have to sell the coat off my back for it.' However, old boy, I've done better even than I expected; and here's what you lent me a fortnight ago at St. Laurent, and the other sum you lent me in London, too. It's three seventeen in all. I suppose you will take French money?"

"Certainly," said Lacy, kindly, though not effusively; "and I must thank you for taking the trouble to bring it up here yourself."

"I was determined," said the Poodle, who looked a little disappointed at not having roused his friend to a greater warmth of manner, "that you shouldn't go on thinking as you did of me for one moment longer than I could help. So I just put by every five-franc piece I could spare, and have managed to do it a month sooner than I expected. Just count the money, will you, that you may see I have not cheated you. There should be eight notes there for a thousand francs, nine for a hundred, and twenty-five francs in silver."

Lacy shook out the coins on to the table, counted the notes themselves, said carelessly, "It is all right," and showed an inclination to turn to some other subject. But at this the Poodle looked oddly worried and disappointed. "You'd better," he said, "see also that I have done the sum rightly, and given you back for your sovereigns the proper amount of francs."

"There can't," said Lacy, "be much doubt about that. Still, if you wish it, I will do the sum myself." He took a pencil and began to put down the figures. "The sum in pounds," he said, "is three hundred and seventeen. Three, one, seven, multiplied by twenty-five — why, hang it, my dear fellow, you've given me a thousand francs too much!"

Lacy was not at that moment watching the Poodle's face. Had he been doing so, he would have seen an irrepressible expression of satisfaction in it, as if something which had nearly failed had succeeded admirably at last. His whole manner underwent a complete change.

"Dear old boy," he exclaimed, sinking familiarly into a chair, "it can't be so. Give me hold of the pencil. Just look here now! — well! — if this doesn't beat cock-fighting! You're right. It's seven thousand. So much the better for me. I know what happened. I got into the habit of putting these thousand-franc notes by for you; and from always being haunted by the thought that there were still too few of them, I ended — it's a funny thing — by slipping in one too many."

Lacy, though distrustful of human nature in general, was easily inspired with a belief in particular specimens of it.

"Well," he said, his manner recovering its accustomed cordiality, "here are your thousand francs back again. As for the rest, I must once more thank you for it."

"Dear old boy," exclaimed the Poodle, recovering all his effusiveness, "I was awfully ashamed to ask you for it, but I never can tell you what it did for me. If it hadn't been for you, I should be in a debtor's prison. Your poor friend would, at this moment, be in brown hollands. As it is, this business will end in being a famous thing for me, though, of course, in my present position I can't do so well as I might

do, and I don't touch much of the solid profits till settling day. That's where the rub is."

An inward voice, articulate as the Demon of Socrates, warned Lacy to take no notice of this remark; but the Poodle's pathos had touched him, and the warning was disregarded.

"I had hoped," he said, "from what you told me, that you were doing even better than you expected." He might well have been in doubt as to the Poodle's precise position; for the Poodle all through his life had kept at his disposal two alternative views of his circumstances — at one moment insisting on his poverty, when he was hoping for a loan from the benevolent; at another insisting on his solvency, when he was hoping for a loan from the prudent.

"Old boy," said the Poodle, with a sudden spasm of frankness, "after what you've been tempted to think of me I couldn't again take any help from you — not help of that sort — even if you offered it. But one sort of help I will ask of you — your advice. Just look here now. The position in which I am is this. I get at present, for doing Sam's dirty work, just enough to keep me from day to day, and the lump sum due to me does not come till the end. But if I could raise about fifteen thousand francs, I could buy a business — something like what I've been doing — and work in with a friend of mine — an awfully good chap. I say," exclaimed the Poodle, suddenly, as his eyes fell on a photograph which stood on a table near him, "who's that?"

"It's my cousin," said Lacy, "Mr. Octavius Brandon's son, who died of a fever last year at Chicago."

"Oh," said the Poodle, still eying the portrait. "Well, old boy, as I was saying, this friend of mine — talking of America, he's been out there too, and made a nice little pile, every dollar of which he lost in a silver mine. He has to begin the whole long struggle again. I've done a little for him, and I've got him a billet under Sam. His share alone, at the end of the season, will be something like a thousand pounds, and mine will be three times that; and if only meanwhile we could clap hands on this six hundred pounds —

well, there this business is for us, which would set us up for life."

Lacy looked down silently at a bit of writing-paper and began, as though in meditation, scribbling aimless lines on it. "I don't think," he at last said slowly, "that there ought to be any difficulty about raising this money."

The Poodle leaned eagerly towards him.

"I think," Lacy continued, "Mr. Davis himself would advance it to you, on the security of the sum which you say he already owes you."

"That shows," exclaimed the Poodle, suddenly drawing back, "that shows, old boy, how little you know of Sam. Of course — but it's no good talking of that — if you had had enough confidence in me to have taken my word — and I think, after all, I've shown myself not untrustworthy — come, old boy, have not I made a gallant fight for it — paying you back every penny like this? However, no matter. I'm awfully sorry I troubled you. I'll go to Sam, as you suggest. He'll chuck me — but what's the odds!"

"You go too fast," said Lacy. "Let me talk a bit of plain sense to you. You tell me you want a sum of money for a certain specified purpose — that you would engage to repay it when certain payments are made to yourself, but that you have no security on which to raise it which a business man would look at. Nor is it quite possible that I may be able to advance you this sum myself; and, so far as security goes, I shall be willing to take your word. But if you want me to do anything, you must let me have full particulars of the business you want to buy — its nature, the name of the firm, its present condition, and so on. If you'll write me out a memorandum, and give me time to make inquiries myself, I'll see what I can do to help you."

The Poodle's face, as he listened, grew extremely red. "Well, old boy," he said, "if you can't trust me altogether, don't trust me at all. It so happens that I'm bound by the most solemn engagement to reveal no details about this business to anybody. I confess I think you might have taken my word for it that it's a sound paying thing. I think my acts

have spoken for themselves. The moment I had money enough, I've rushed off to pay you. I stopped here on my journey — for I'm going back to London for a week; and I should have come to you with my pennies a week sooner if I hadn't been so much in earnest that I fancied I owed you more than I did."

"My dear Poodle," said Lacy, "your indignation is a little unreasonable. You want money to be advanced to you on the specific ground that you mean to invest it in a certain established business; and I say you shall have the money, if you will only let me assure myself that this business is worth buying. But I'm not going to throw away six hundred pounds in the dark for a purpose which might possibly profit you as little as it did me. And there's another thing I must mention, for you really force me to do so. You have paid me back two sums you borrowed of me, and you have done so, you tell me, a month sooner than you expected."

"I have," said the Poodle, with sulky emphasis.

"Very well, then," said Lacy, "the first sum you borrowed was for three weeks. Your cheque was sent back dishonoured. The second was for three days; you repay it after as many weeks; and you tell me that though you have been late in making both repayments, you never expected to have made them till a month later. Now, had these delays been due to any inability on your part to repay me, I should have said nothing about the matter. I should not even have thought about it. But it is nonsense to pretend that you've repaid me at the earliest moment possible, when for the last fortnight money, which you admit was mine, you've been throwing away on a *cocotte*, and on absurd dinners to her friends."

At these words the Poodle rose from his seat. "Well," he said, in a voice which quivered with scornful indignation, "if you're going to talk to me about a delicate thing like that — if you think it's gentlemanly — if you think it's honourable to drag in a woman's name — I must say good-bye to you. I can't stop any longer to be insulted; and I can only tell you now, after what you have just said, that I wouldn't touch a penny of your dirty money if you gave it to me."

By the time he had finished speaking he had managed to reach the door. Before Lacy could follow him, or ring for a servant, he was gone; and the front door a moment later was heard banging behind him.

The face of the Poodle, as he thus beat retreat, was a study; and as he went down the approach, making vindictive flourishes with his stick, his voice, no less than his face, gave hints as to his state of mind. "I like that," he muttered. "That's the way to treat one, when one brings him back not his own dirty money only, but two thousand francs besides!" The Poodle could not be accurate even when he was haranguing himself. "Why, hang it, with his memoranda, he's a greater Shylock than Sam!" Presently he added, in a quieter and more reflective voice, "I was a fool to flare up at him. I did not play my cards well. That extra bank-note — it ought to have been an ace of trumps. And now" — he stopped short, and gnawed his lips with vexation — "two-thirds of my winnings," he moaned, "are gone in paying a man who ought to be only too thankful if he got his money back in a year. A year! — in two years, three years, five years. What is money to him! Why, if that poor cousin of his hadn't died in Chicago, he'd have been borrowing of me, not I of him." As he said those words the Poodle stood stock still. Then he suddenly stuck his stick in the ground, gave a little skip in the air, and exclaimed aloud, "I have it! That will make my friend sit up! By George," he added with a laugh, "I'd give twice the money he's refused me for the fun of a lark like this!"

He quickened his pace to something very like a run; and he soon had reached the lodge, and passed into the public road. Here he began to look about him; and he had not proceeded far before he was joined by a man, young and elaborately dressed, who lightly leaped into the roadway from one of the wooded banks.

"Well," he said, with a drawl and a slightly nasal accent, "and what luck? Is the millionnaire mad to be stumping up? He won't be a millionnaire very long if he is."

"My dear George B.," said the Poodle, "I've done all I

could for you. But it's no go. When I said you wanted capital to join with me in buying a business — for, after all, to find capital for a system is to buy a business in a sense — he wanted me to draw up a memoranda of what the business was. Damn it, George B., I'm too indignant just now to talk about it. I'll tell you all by and by. But I've thought of a way by which we can be even with him yet, and pay him off with a fright which he won't forget in a hurry. Look here, George B., I've just seen a photograph in there of your poor brother. By Jove, it's the living image of you. Now you told me that he, just before his last illness — I hope I'm not hurting your feelings by talking of what must have been so fearfully sad for you — had a *leetle* trouble with some brute of a pig-killing husband over a dear, fluffy little woman, who unluckily was the brute's wife. Why is it, George B., that husbands are always brutes? And why are the wives, who think so, always so much too good for them? Anyhow, your poor brother found there was the very devil to pay."

"He did," said George B., in not very broken-hearted tones; "and he'd hardly found this out before he went direct to his creditors. That's a thing, Mr. Poodle, I guess, which you don't do over-frequently."

"Well," resumed the Poodle, "why shouldn't you and I — But wait — here's somebody coming. I'll tell you when he's gone by. Who in the world is that? Is he a doctor, or a Methodist parson?"

The person who was mounting the hill which the Poodle and his friend were descending, might, to judge from appearances, have been either one or the other. He strode up the ascent with an air of severe strenuousness, as though he were elevated by the sense of performing a somewhat distasteful duty; and now and again he raised his wide-awake hat and mopped his forehead with a handkerchief as big as a towel. When he reached the lodge-gates of the Château des Fleurs, he stood still, and made a long and scrutinising grimace at them. Then he rang the bell, and was presently admitted within the precincts.

Lacy was still in his library, thinking over his interview

with the Poodle, when a letter was brought to him, which contained, in addition to the signature, these few words: "Dear Mr. Lacy, before venturing to intrude on you, I send this in to ask for a short interview about a matter which is really important. I otherwise should not have troubled you."

"Show the gentleman in," Lacy said to the servant; and a moment later, in the doorway, appeared Mr. Prouse Bousefield. Mr. Bousefield's expression and bearing, though staid, were naturally genial; but his whole air, at this moment, had a hardness, and a certain suggestion of defiance, which made Lacy think he must have come to him to complain of some unknown injury. His first words, however, dissipated this impression.

"Mr. Lacy," he said, looking about him furtively, "my world is a very different world from yours; and I hope you won't think my presenting myself in this way an intrusion."

"My dear Mr. Bousefield," exclaimed Lacy, who now perceived that his visitor was merely suffering from an acute form of shyness, "come and sit down, do. I am more than pleased to see you."

"I am," said Mr. Bousefield, subsiding on the edge of a chair, and leaning forward as if to indicate that his stay would be of the very briefest — "I am not come to inflict an idle call on you, but to talk to you about a piece of business which I think might really interest you. It happens, moreover, to be urgent. Else I need hardly tell you that I shouldn't — though I am no bigot — have troubled you about it on the Lord's day. And will you first," he continued, gradually becoming more at his ease, "let me explain that though I am going to ask you if you would like to take some shares in a certain commercial enterprise, I don't want you to do it unless you yourself should want to. The shares I would offer to you, if you yourself don't take them, will be taken to-morrow by a certain friend of my own; but you, Mr. Lacy, made us so generous an offer in connection with Startfield Hall, that I should like to give you a chance of having an interest in something which I myself believe will, though the beginnings are small, be one of the great successes of the century."

Though Mr. Bousefield's language thus far had been almost as vague as the Poodle's, there was something in his manner and himself which inspired a belief in his integrity; and Lacy, though he began to smile with a faint perception of what was coming, settled himself to listen with a becoming air of attention.

"Well," Mr. Bousefield resumed, "I think we have both mentioned to you — Mrs. Norham and I — that one of our little colony has hit on an invention which is nothing short of marvellous. At first it will be applied to bicycles; but I shrewdly suspect it is capable of much wider application. The principle is simplicity itself. Allow me to show you this diagram. You are aware, no doubt, that there is already an electric lamp in the market, the current for which is generated by the motion of the bicycle itself. Well, what does our friend Tibbits do but conceive the grand idea of using this current to propel the bicycle instead of lighting the rider!"

Mr. Bousefield here, with the aid of his printed diagram, proceeded to explain the details of the great invention, the advantages of which he finally summed up thus: "Each push, you see, which the rider gives to the pedal, not only propels the bicycle in proportion to the strength of that stroke, but stores up an amount of propulsive electric force, which adds itself to the stroke succeeding. Tibbits has worked the whole thing out mathematically, and he says that for every pound of pressure put on the pedal by the rider, the electric motor, allowing for friction and so forth, will add decimal three, seven, nine, six, nine of a pound."

"I see," said Lacy. "The principle, I take it, is this — that you get out of each stroke about a third more than you put into it."

"Precisely," said Mr. Bousefield. "You've grasped the very idea: and, as I say, if this invention succeeds with a bicycle, it will probably be capable of application to other machines as well."

"Indeed, I should think it will," said Lacy, with accents of conviction.

"And now," said Mr. Bousefield, eagerly, as he produced

some more papers, "let us go for a moment to the business side of the matter. We're starting the thing by a little private syndicate, with a capital of seven thousand, which seven people contribute. But the bulk of this sum comes really from myself, from Mrs. Norham, and from Poulton. I'm down for three thousand, Mrs. Norham for two thousand, and Poulton — I didn't know he was such a capitalist — for the rest, minus some few pounds. Well, Poulton, not being a man of much means, is willing, so he has just written to me, to dispose at par of one-quarter of his shares. Mrs. Bousefield, who has means of her own, has offered to take the whole of them; but it occurred both to her and to myself that, in recognition of your great kindness to us, we should like, as this is a great opportunity, to offer them to you first. Everything's under way. Our offices are taken in Queen Victoria Street, for, as Poulton says, a fine position is everything. We're just concluding the purchase of some engineering shops in Lambeth, and Tibbits goes back shortly to superintend the practical part of the business. I don't," said Mr. Bousefield, with genuine delicacy of feeling, "want to press you for an answer at this moment: but the matter must be settled by to-morrow; so, if you would think the matter over, I would ask you to send me a line to-morrow, not later than four o'clock. And now, Mr. Lacy, you know, I must really be off."

Mr. Bousefield glanced round the room, and his shyness seemed once more returning to him. Lacy begged him to come into the drawing-room, where they would probably find tea; but this only rendered his agitation greater, bringing back into his manner a trace of its former *brusquerie*. "Thank you, sir, — thank you, sir," he said, with a nervous movement of his hands, which resulted in his unconsciously drawing on a capacious black kid glove. "Don't trouble to ring. You will perhaps let me out by the window."

Mrs. St. Germans that evening, though she was not a rigid Sabbatarian, gave a turn to the conversation at dinner unmistakably distinctive of the day. She discussed the congregation with whose devotions she had joined her own; and her own, it appeared, had endued her with one of the most diffi-

cult of Christian virtues, and had made her think of her neighbours a great deal more than of herself. "I," she said, "have so long been out of London that I only recognised one or two of the people. Mrs. Mordaunt was there, with a muff of blue fox, and a prayer-book which must have cost almost as much as her muff. And who do you think preached the sermon? Why, the Dean of Northampton. And a very nice sermon it was, too, on the influence of scenery on the moral and spiritual life. The text was from Solomon's Song — 'I said, I will go up to the palm tree.' Mrs. Mordaunt said the rest of the verse, which she looked out in her Bible, was not very *convenable*. Then there was of course a collection; and the plate was carried round by a millionnaire — your mother's friend, Madeleine, Mr. Helbeckstein. His wife and your mother, Mrs. Mordaunt says, will not be here for a day or two: and meanwhile Mr. Helbeckstein has been keeping the bank at baccarat. They've a casino and baccarat already. I call it disgusting. Mrs. Mordaunt told me all this; and she said to me after the service, 'My dear, doesn't this surprise you? We might really have been in Berkely Chapel.'"

Mrs. St. Germans, however, paid for the pleasures and profits of the afternoon by a headache in the evening, which sent her to bed early; and her granddaughter having gone up with her to supplement the attentions of her maid, Lacy and Lady Madeleine, left alone in the drawing-room, were tempted by the warmth of the night to go out on to one of the balconies. The beauty of the moonlit scene tended to revive in both of them something of the mood which had possessed them when they had walked together in the morning.

"These have been pleasant days," said Lacy, "which we have been spending here all together. They have been like clear lakes shut out by a reef of coral from the sea."

"To me," she answered, "they have been very pleasant also. But unless you have had some of the feelings which I alluded to earlier in the day, I cannot imagine that to you they can have been very exciting."

"No," he said; "not exciting. I have done with what you call excitement. But here, in this retreat, I have had visions

— I have them now — of a time when a passionate and unquestioning belief in life gave to a night like this the quality of a kiss or of a prayer."

"Estelle," exclaimed Lady Madeleine, hearing a slight noise in the drawing-room, "is that you? Why don't you come out here?"

A young voice answered, "Madeleine, is that you?" And the child joined the others as they stood there in the clear darkness.

The three exchanged some of those flat and fragmentary observations which the beauty of the scene would have elicited from ninety-nine people out of a hundred. Then, for the sake of a change, they began to pace the balcony. As they passed one of the drawing-room windows, Lady Madeleine disappeared, and Lacy and Miss St. Germans were left alone with the moonlight. They were for a moment or two not aware of this. Then the girl perceived it.

"Madeleine has gone in," she said, and made a slight movement as though she would follow her example.

"Don't go away," said Lacy, hardly conscious of the words he uttered, but seeming to himself to be following the dictates of mere politeness. The effect of his words, however, slight as it was, and unnoticed as it would have been by any ordinary observer, startled him and roused him with something like a thrill of pain. When he said to her, "Don't go away," she turned again towards him with the willing obedience of a petal responding to some slightest breath of wind. There was a slow dignity in her movement; but, delicately disguised though it was, he saw, or thought he saw, in it an unconscious self-surrender. He had been willing enough that this girl should influence and freshen his life. He had never coveted the responsibility of exercising any influence over hers. Up to the present moment he had been delightfully at ease in her company. He was now surprised by a sudden consciousness of embarrassment. The consequence was that, after one or two repetitions of the platitudes they had already uttered in conventional honour of the moonlight, they stood together leaning on the stone balustrade in silence. A rapid

glance at her showed him that her head was averted; and this being the case, he allowed his eyes to rest on her. It became necessary to speak at last. "Can you hear it," he said, in a voice which he hardly recognised as his own, "the sea breaking on the beach?" For a moment she answered nothing; and then, without looking at him, said softly, "I was listening to it. I was wondering what it said. Do you understand what it says?"

He, too, in his turn for a moment was quite quiet. Then calling her by a name by which he had called her only once before, he said, "Yes, dear, I understand quite well. But it is saying something to me which I never can say to you."

He had hardly spoken the words before he began to reproach himself for having done so. That he could possibly marry her, was an idea which he entertained only to push it away from him. He could no more marry her, he felt, than he could go back to school; though he envied her the prospects which are visible from schoolroom windows only. And yet even now some words of hers came back to him, which she had spoken to him when they first met. "I could pour out my whole life in painting — in painting one bough of an almond tree with its pink blossoms against the sky — five or six pink blossoms, as if they and the sky were everything." This image tantalised him — this boundless hermitage for the fancy, made up of infinity and the pink of these scented petals. Was there no such hermitage which his being might share with hers?

He was roused from these reflections by her voice. "Grandmamma tells me," she said, "that you are going — and I too — to a dinner at your uncle's, and that there is going to be a party afterwards."

"She told me to accept for you," he answered. "I hope you don't object."

"We've been so happy," she said; "and now all our pleasant days will be over. You have liked to talk to me when there was no one else to talk to; but when once you are back amongst all these other people, of course you won't care to talk to me any more."

His heart went out towards her; but this time he was on his

guard; and he merely said laughingly, "That shows how little you know about it."

But if he was on his guard then, the next moment she took him by surprise. She put her hand out to him. He could not avoid taking it. "I am saying," she whispered, "good-bye to the old days — the happiest days I have ever had in my life." And then abruptly disengaging herself, she slipped back like a shadow into the lamplight.

CHAPTER XXII

Though Lacy had assured Miss St. Germans that their impending plunge into society would do nothing to alter the quiet tenor of their existence, he found himself looking forward to it with the hope that it would really do so, and rouse the young girl, from what he feared might be a foolish dream, to interests more in accordance with her years, and with practical possibilities. He even counted the hours, next day, till the carriage should be standing at the door to carry them off to the gaieties of the Villa Martin.

In this mood of expectancy Lacy was not alone. It was shared by another, though for different and loftier reasons. Successful as Mrs. Norham had been when she was under Lord Runcorn's roof, she was haunted, saddened, and indeed irritated by a sense that she had not ended the day of her visit to him nearly as brilliantly as she began it; and that at the Château des Fleurs, she, the most remarkable woman of the century, would have been utterly ignored and neglected, if a useless little doll of a girl had not recognised her for what she was. She felt that if she must mix with the idle and the fashionable at all, who were, as she again told herself, the true vulgar, it was her duty to show them, by impressing on them her own personality, what paltry creatures they were when measured by any true standard; and she longed for a recurrence of the opportunity which at the Château des Fleurs had been let slip by her. Accordingly when a letter, adorned with a gilt monogram, was brought her that morning by one of Lord Runcorn's servants, her heart beat itself against her corset with a vehemence almost painful; but pleasure, when she read its contents, left no room in her for pain.

"Dear Mrs. Norham," Lady Cornelia wrote, "If the many claims on your time should by accident leave you free this evening, my brother, Lord Runcorn, has asked me to say how grateful he would be to you if you would join us at a little impromptu dinner, and allow him the privilege of introducing you to a few intellectual friends. If your answer is Yes, as I hope it will be, I shall be equally pleased on my own account; and we will, in that case, send a closed carriage for you, which will bring you and take you back again. — I am, dear Mrs. Norham, yours sincerely, CORNELIA LEYTON.

"*P.S.* — My brother has this moment come into the room, in order to suggest that it would be a much better plan for you to come to-day at tea-time, and not go back till to-morrow."

To this missive Mrs. Norham returned the answer which she judged to be most consistent with her character and her high calling; and shortly afterwards encountering Mr. Bousefield, she mentioned the invitation she had received, and the manner in which she had replied to it. There had been only one subject — namely, that of revealed religion — as to which Mr. Bousefield hitherto had ventured to differ from Mrs. Norham. What he said to her now, therefore, was all the more remarkable. He said to her, pursing up his mouth, and contracting his sandy eyebrows, "I think you have decided wrongly."

Lord Runcorn's dinner was nominally at a quarter to eight o'clock; but Lacy, when his guests came rustling down from their bedrooms, having kept the carriage waiting for twenty minutes at least, felt justified in assuring them that with Lord Runcorn, who had all the irregularities of a poet, a quarter to eight would certainly mean a quarter after. They were therefore somewhat surprised, on reaching the Villa Martin, to find all the party already in the drawing-room before them. The number of people present was not more than nine or ten; but they were too numerous for Lacy to take in at a glance. One figure, however, at once caught his attention. This was the figure of Mrs. Norham, who was, when he entered the room, sitting on a stool at the feet of Lady Cornelia, casting at her

an upward glance, and helping her to wind some wool. It happened that at this moment the ball tumbled on the floor. Lady Cornelia stooped to arrest it; but it eluded her and ran under a chair. Lady Cornelia was about to rise, in order to catch the truant; but Mrs. Norham anticipated her. She skipped up from her stool, dived for the ball, reclaimed it, and then, with a filial archness, placed it in Lady Cornelia's hands. Lady Cornelia looked down at her, her eyes swimming with benignity. "Thank you, dear," she said: and Mrs. Norham was happy. Lacy, whose observation was at times abnormally quick, took in the whole incident at a glance; although, not knowing that Mrs. Norham had come "to dine and sleep," and had ever since five o'clock been converting Lady Cornelia to the cause of social equality by waiting on her, he was somehow at a loss to conjecture how the Church of the future had achieved such rapid success in subjugating the World of the present. He had no time, however, to continue his speculations on the subject; for he had no sooner exchanged a word or two with his aunt and with Mrs. Mordaunt, than his attention was caught by Lord Runcorn's good-looking secretary. This young man proved to be none other than Mr. Cyril Watson, whom Lacy had last seen in the lamplight of the New Rotunda, disappearing with the lady whom he had known already in Lampsacus.

"My dear fellow," he exclaimed, grasping the young man's hand, "this is an unexpected pleasure."

A moment or two later, however, his pleasure was slightly modified, when, on dinner being announced, he saw his attractive friend — his friend so susceptible to beauty in all its forms — entrusted with the duty of taking in Miss St. Germans. As for himself, his companion was Mrs. Mordaunt. Mrs. Norham fell to the lot of the eloquent and liberal Dean, who had preached the day before on scenery and Christian morals, and who was celebrated for having said from the pulpit of St. Paul's Cathedral that the reading of good novels was a religious service in itself, much of the Bible showing us that discursive fiction was the favourite form in which the Spirit of Truth revealed itself; whilst Lady Cornelia, as she brought up

the rear, leaned on the arm of a literary ex-Ambassador. In inviting Mrs. Norham, therefore, to meet "some intellectual friends," she had not been indulging in a mere figure of speech. It was indeed the appearance of the Dean as an afternoon caller, and the supervening necessity of asking him one day to dinner, that had prompted the sudden and pressing invitation to Mrs. Norham. The distinguished Churchman having, at his host's solemn request, articulated a short grace, had hardly begun his soup before, with a smile of brotherly and confidential patronage, he was expressing to Mrs. Norham his extreme pleasure in meeting her; and was congratulating her on the noble moral tone of her writings.

The table was round; the decorations were low; and the party was of a size which allowed conversation to become general. The ex-Ambassador, perceiving that the Dean was already discussing with the novelist the nature of her message to the world, leaned forward with a flattering attention, and, catching Mrs. Norham's eye, said, "I fear I am not qualified to judge of the moral of your book; but what I admire is the art which has enabled you to give it a moral without making it dull."

"That," said Lord Runcorn, "is because Mrs. Norham knows that whatever moral the artist may wish to teach, he must make his work true to human nature first."

"Precisely," said the ex-Ambassador, still looking at Mrs. Norham. "And this suggests a question I have very often discussed, both with authors and ordinary mortals. I mean, What ranks of society supply the novelist with the material which enables him to represent human nature most completely? You would say the humbler ranks, I suppose, judging from your practice?"

No question could have delighted Mrs. Norham more. It enabled her to chastise the society around her, whilst shining in it. "Whatever kind of life," she said, "yields material for a good novel, there is one kind of life which does *not;* and that is the life of fashion. Any kind of novel *may* be without serious meaning. The fashionable novel *must* be."

"It must," said Lord Runcorn, looking at Mrs. Norham

with so much consideration in his eyes that she felt it would be an honour to be contradicted by him, "it must, as you truly observe, be without serious meaning, if it deals only with those points in which the fashionable class differs from other classes. But the same holds good of the novel of humble life also; for the peculiarities of no class form more than a small part of its life. The life of every class is, in a sense, its language; but it is a very poor novel which has the mere dialect for its hero. This, I presume, is what Mrs. Norham means."

"No," said Mrs. Norham, with a *brusquerie* which surprised the company. The spirit of opposition was rising in her, and she felt it her delightful duty to convince herself and others of her high and noble independence. "I don't mean that. I mean something, I fear, more sweeping. I mean that the life of the fashionable classes — the life which" — Mrs. Norham began to say "we," but corrected herself and substituted "you" — "the life which you all lead, refined and brilliant though it may be, does not contain in itself that fulness of human nature which is found in the life of those who do the real work of the world."

"Dear Mrs. Norham," murmured Lady Cornelia, caressingly, "I like you for saying bravely what you think to be true. Did you see how her brown eyes flashed?" she added in an audible whisper to her neighbour. Mrs. Norham heard the whisper, and the flashings became still more brilliant.

"Literature," said Lord Runcorn, "has this advantage over politics and religion, that we may differ from one another about it without disrespect or animosity. Were such not the case, I should hardly venture to state my own view of the matter; for it happens to be the precise opposite of Mrs. Norham's. If we mean by fashionable life the whole life of the highest classes — not merely the fraction of it which is made up of balls and parties — I should say that this was the life which affords the novelist or the poet the best and richest, instead of the poorest, material for representing what is most profound and universal in human nature. Look at all the great dramas of the world, from those of Sophocles to those of Shakespeare. The principal characters in them have been

kings, queens, and nobles. And what is the reason? The reason is that we see in the upper ranks the universal elements of human nature exhibited with exceptional clearness, and less obscured than elsewhere by what is accidental and unimportant. When a queen loses a son, why does a nation mourn? Not because a queen's sorrow is greater than that of any other bereaved mother; but because her elevation makes her an exceptionally striking type, not of what is peculiar, but of what is common. She is for her subjects the image of all sorrow; and the tears that are shed for her are shed for every hearth that is desolate."

Mrs. Mordaunt laid her hand on Lord Runcorn's cuff, and with swimming eyes said, "Beautiful."

Lord Runcorn looked at her for a moment, and again turned towards Mrs. Norham.

"And the same criticism," he continued, "if Mrs. Norham will let me say so, applies to human nature as we see it in polite society. What all classes feel and struggle for — their thoughts, their satisfactions, their disillusions — we find these in their clearest and most complete development. We have the same pebble everywhere; but there we have the pebble polished, and we see veins in it which escape our eyes elsewhere."

The spirit of opposition in Mrs. Norham became now stronger than ever.

"Yes," she exclaimed, "and that is the very thing against which I, and those who work and who think with me, protest. Why should these thoughts, desires, feelings — what you will — reach a development which is relatively complete in one class, whilst they are hardly allowed, in others, to show themselves above the surface? Your theory might have held good in former days, when aristocracies, whatever their faults, were to some extent really functional; but what we call aristocracies to-day are founded only on money."

"Every aristocracy," said Lord Runcorn, "has been founded on the same thing — that is on a power over the material resources of life. The lord of the manor, whose rents were paid in services, may have had few coins in his purse — fewer than

the ordinary artisan of to-day; but though he had not the coins, he had what the coins buy."

"Do you mean," exclaimed Mrs. Norham, "that in the old days of functional feudalism no one was a gentleman who was not rich, and that every one was a gentleman in exact proportion to his riches?"

"No," said Lord Runcorn, with a smile so courteous that it brought to Mrs. Norham a sense of some crudity in her own behaviour, "I do not mean precisely that. An aristocracy in any country wants more than money could buy; but it is absolutely necessary that it should have as much. I speak of the class. I do not speak of individuals. In any state of society you can have poor aristocrats; but you cannot, in a rich country, have a poor aristocracy. If it is permanently impoverished, it is dead."

"But surely," said Mrs. Mordaunt in a tone of tender remonstrance, "you don't mean to say that you think nothing of old family?"

Lord Runcorn leaned back in his chair and looked round him with a genial laugh which relieved the conversation from the strain which Mrs. Norham had put on it. "I feel," he said, "for old families just as I do for old houses. Other things being equal, I prefer the old house to the new; but I prefer a new house which is habitable to an old one which is beyond repair."

"My dear," said Lady Cornelia, catching Lady Madeleine's eye, "we must be going, or our gentlemen will never have finished their cigarettes; and we've one or two people coming to us this evening — friends who have arrived suddenly at this strange little watering-place close by."

Mrs. Norham, though she felt that towards the end of dinner the leadership of the conversation had very nearly escaped her, was radiantly conscious of having thus far enjoyed a most successful evening. She was warmed with the new thought that in her crusade against privilege she was attacking the class to which she herself belonged; and she confided to Lady Cornelia, in an ingratiating whisper over her coffee-cup, that she meant to migrate to Mayfair from the quarter in which she at

present dwelt, "because," she said, "you know one must live near one's friends."

"Come, dear," said Lady Cornelia, "and take yourself a house near me."

"I should love to," said Mrs. Norham, with her head a little on one side, at the angle which she remembered Lady Cornelia had so much appreciated. Then, whilst this scene was in progress, the gentlemen of the party reappeared; and all of them, Lord Runcorn included, seemed anxious to hang upon her words. Mrs. Norham was so triumphant that she felt she could afford to be generous; so turning to Lord Runcorn, and making her first effort at archness, "Lord Runcorn," she said, "you treated me very badly at dinner. You did what no woman forgives. You completely got the better of me. However — "

But Mrs. Norham's sentence was unfortunately cut short. The door was thrown open; the first guests of the evening — "Captain and Mrs. Algernon Kirby" — were announced by a superb domestic; and a tall young man, with a quiet, well-bred mouth, entered, accompanied by the most dazzling of imaginable wives, whose dark eyes shone with the happy sense that wedded life was fulfilling her fondest hopes of it, and that she already was becoming rapidly recognised as one of the most dangerous of the young married women of London.

The effect was magical. Lord Runcorn and Lady Cornelia both turned away from Mrs. Norham. Her incipient archness was left a forlorn torso.

"My dearest Algy," Lady Cornelia exclaimed, overwhelming him with all the banalities which make up an intimate welcome, "when I've said a word to Zoe, you must come and tell me everything about yourself."

To say a word to Zoe, however, was not so easy a task, as her hand was already in the possession of Lord Runcorn, who was pouring into her ears a series of those compliments which are absolutely unsuitable for the ears of more than one woman at a time, and which always delight the women who for a moment will consent to tolerate them. At first Mrs. Norham stood waiting for the time to come when she herself

would again be the centre of attention; but other guests began presently arriving in quick succession, and Mrs. Norham was left with nothing to do but watch them, and wonder when the process of introducing the most distinguished of them to herself would begin. Meanwhile, for want of anything better to do, she listened to the kind of conversation for which her own had been thus abandoned. Her feelings were too deep for tears. She saw Mrs. Mordaunt, who had been hanging on her accents during dinner, float softly up to Mrs. Kirby, detach her dexterously from Lord Runcorn, and flutter her pulses with a caressing praise of her toilette, which Mrs. Kirby valued even more than Lord Runcorn's praise of her person.

"And tell me, dear," Mrs. Norham heard her saying, "was the fancy ball at Carterton really a great success?" To which Mrs. Kirby was heard to reply volubly that nothing in the world had ever gone off better, and that there had been a party of thirty-eight in the house.

Then, when this colloquy came, as it soon did, to an end, Mrs. Norham saw Mrs. Mordaunt attach herself to a mature dowager, and heard her say, "So Mrs. Kirby was at Carterton after all. Now, how was that done, do you think? For, to my certain knowledge, she hadn't been asked a week before the ball."

"What makes you think that?" Mrs. Mordaunt's friend asked.

"Why, this," Mrs. Mordaunt answered. "I met her at luncheon at the Macdonalds'; and I heard her saying to somebody that the Duchess 'was a very odd woman.' When any one says that of any one who is going to give a party, I always know that the person who says it is not invited."

"I can tell you," said another lady, "exactly how Mrs. Algy got there. She asked Jenny Horton to get her an invitation. And Jenny did; but she now goes about telling everybody that she never hated doing anything so much in her whole life, and that she'll never speak to Mrs. Algy again, for having made her do it."

"And next season," said the dowager, "they'll be hunting

again in couples — unless — well — unless the bone of contention separates them."

Mrs. Norham listened with horror to these frivolities. Was it possible, she asked herself, that a man like Lord Runcorn, who not only had talent enough to misgovern an empire, but enough of the higher insight to appreciate her own abilities, should think that a society which could occupy itself with such degrading gossip was the society in which the novelist could best study human nature? What to her were these pitiable and pigmy jealousies — these heart-burnings hardly worthy of a lap-dog — these ambitions worthy only of a child! Why had she condescended to dine — and not only dine but sleep — at a house like this, where almost every sentence uttered was an implied neglect of herself? She was busy asking her heart this poignant question, when Lord Runcorn approached, with purpose in his eyes and movements. Was it she whom he was seeking out? Was his truer judgment returning to him? Her heart gave a solemn flutter. Events answered her in the negative. Lord Runcorn was in quest of Mrs. Mordaunt. With ready response she turned to him, as he murmured some request to her; and with a moment's protest, which was consent in its most obvious form, she moved away with him to some distant part of the room.

Presently Mrs. Norham's ear was invaded by a friendly voice, saying, "I gather we are to have some vocal and instrumental music."

Mrs. Norham looked, and saw that the speaker was the liberal Dean. She experienced a disappointment which she had no time to analyse; but as any one to talk to was, she felt, better than nobody, and as the Dean was at that moment of precisely the same opinion, these two distinguished persons kept one another in countenance, being held together by the link of a common sorrow — a sorrow at not being able to talk to somebody else. Presently, however, even the prophetess of love for others was startled into forgetfulness of her own social claims. There was launched on the air a low, vibrating sound, more beautiful than anything she had ever heard before. This was the voice of Mrs. Mordaunt singing. If ever woman

had tears in her voice she had; and what she was singing now was written by an English poet, whose extraordinarily simple and wholly peculiar pathos affects the reader like a knife touching an unhealed wound. The song was "Airley Beacon," and its author was Charles Kingsley. The company, which numbered now something like fifty people, crowded round the piano, all absolutely silent; and when Mrs. Mordaunt sang the two concluding lines —

> "All alone on Airley Beacon,
> With his baby on my knee,"

the only applause or thanks she received for a few minutes was the deep breathing of listeners who could hardly trust themselves to speak.

Meanwhile one of the windows of the lighted room had been opened, and beyond were the blue and the cypresses of the warm, moonstruck night, a gleam of balustrades and marble, and a far-off shimmering of the sea. Lacy was standing by himself at one of the open windows, lost in his own thoughts. Something suddenly roused him; and he became aware that Mrs. Norham, still under the escort of her Dean, was about to step out of doors and have a look at the garden. Catching his eye, she gave him a steadfast look which conveyed to him an invitation — indeed something like a command — to join her. He showed no inclination to obey, but he leaned towards her as she was passing, and said: "These are the feelings that give life its meaning, if it mean anything."

He spoke with an emotion which Mrs. Norham had never before seen exhibited by him. She gave up the pretence of following the Dean through the window, and allowed that dignitary to wait for her, solitary, in the open air, and doing his best to prevent himself looking foolish, by scrutinising everything with an intellectual Broad-Church smile.

"What feelings do you mean?" said Mrs. Norham, with a growing intensity, which was due almost as much to her own personal sufferings as to a sense that in Lacy's words there was an intellectual challenge to herself.

"Did you," said Lacy, "not listen to that song? The heroine of Airley Beacon knew nothing about progress or altruism. She had none of the educational advantages offered by Startfield Hall. But one song like that touches me far more than all the volumes ever written about humanity. What is the master-passion of all ages and nations? Love — affection — whatever you like to call it — which, although its object is another, yet springs from and returns to self. If it doesn't do that, what is the meaning of jealousy?"

"Oh!" exclaimed Mrs. Norham, wringing her hands. She was in a mood which obliged her to be emphatic, if she wished to avoid being hysterical. "Come to us — will you — to one of our meetings — our services — and learn something of that spirit of altruism before which jealousy dies. The day is not quite fixed yet. We are expecting friends from a distance. I will write —"

She looked up at Lacy, and saw that he had ceased to listen. The group round the piano had again been growing animated. Another song from Mrs. Mordaunt, it was quite evident, was impending. The strings of the piano sounded, and in another moment the air was silent except for the words —

"I arise from dreams of thee."

Lacy stood where he was, himself like a man dreaming. If Mrs. Norham's evening had been, since dinner, unfortunate, Lacy's had not been less so, though for very different reasons. At dinner he had been slightly annoyed — though hardly conscious that he was so — by noticing the attentions which his uncle's attractive secretary, full of animation and poetry, was bestowing on Miss St. Germans. He experienced the absurd sensation of having been separated from her for a long time; and he had been looking forward to the moment when the drawing-room should reunite them. But in the drawing-room every attempt to address her, or even to approach her, had been frustrated. One of Lord Runcorn's guests after another had taken possession of him. Several mothers had inflicted their daughters on his aggrieved attention; Mrs. Algernon

Kirby had bestowed on him such flattering glances, that he felt as if she was pinning her eyes, like a choice flower, into his buttonhole. The ex-Ambassador had prosed to him about Continental politics. Except at Lady Scarva's party, this was his first appearance in public since he had actually been a rich man; and here he was the hero of the evening. He was conscious of his consequence, but ungratefully impatient of its results. He had seen out of the corner of his eye several of the younger men, and several of the girls also, introduced to Miss St. Germans, and in quick succession engrossing her. His only comfort had been that young Mr. Cyril Watson had had various duties to perform which kept *him*, at all events, at a distance; but this was to Lacy a negative comfort merely; and when Mrs. Mordaunt's singing dissolved the ties of conversation by which he had been bound to people with whom he did not wish to converse, he retired to the window, and was engaged in scanning the company, anxious to see where Miss St. Germans was. It was in this occupation that Mrs. Norham had interrupted him. Something of his mood had betrayed itself in his manner of replying to her; and now that Mrs. Mordaunt had again begun to sing, his eyes and thoughts had gone back to their quest. They had not to continue it long. Many of the guests, as the song began, had seated themselves, and left a vista, through which, at its farther end, a gilt settee revealed itself to Lacy's vision, which at this moment was supporting Miss St. Germans and Mr. Cyril Watson.

He suddenly became conscious of a pain as sharp and unmistakable as that which is inflicted by the bite of a poisonous snake. He became in a moment as a man whose eyes are opened. The girl whom he had been seeing and conversing with every day, whom he had viewed with no feeling stronger than a manageable and imaginative interest, except perhaps for two moments, of which he had at once repented, was now transfigured as he looked at her; and as he looked at her, the thrilling voice of the singer, though he hardly knew that he heard it, was touching his nerves, and was adding its own passion to his.

His eyes were still resting on her when this song came to an

end. Then she turned her head, and her eyes encountered his. There was no shyness in her look. There was something sad in it, and curiously mature. It was a mixture of petition and command. At this moment Lord Runcorn beckoned to his secretary, and the young man had to get up and go to him — to go and to leave his beautiful companion unprotected. Now was Lacy's opportunity. Before any one else could approach, he was standing by her, and was saying abruptly, "Will you come out into the garden?"

She rose from her seat instantly, and followed him towards the same window at which, a moment ago, he had been talking to Mrs. Norham.

Just as the blossoming of a passion may turn a woman into a girl, so will it turn a young girl into a woman. But in the case of the young girl, this change has a curious incongruity which invests it with a special interest. There is, indeed, to change the metaphor, something almost appalling in the contrast between the mystical wine — the ageless vintage trodden from unknown grapes, which is the sacrament, the poison, the life, of all living human things, and the fragile and tender chalice which holds it, and in which it trembles. It gives to her, in Byron's words, "an aspect beyond time" — an aspect, moreover, which has in it a suggestion of tragedy, like that of a woman who stands on a midnight bridge, and looks at the waters with eyes full of her own fate.

Such was the change which, for Lacy's eyes at all events, had come over Estelle St. Germans as he and she, with Mrs. Mordaunt's music in their ears, at last went out together from the lamplight into the world of shade and silver, where the flowers were dark in the moonlight, and the gravelled walks were white, and a furlong of balustrades and statues glimmered like glossy steel.

"Do you think," he said, "now you have seen me with all these people, that I want to talk to them instead of talking to you? Since I have talked to them, I find that I like your company even better than I did."

CHAPTER XXIII

Mrs. Norham, when she started for St. Antoine the morning after Lord Runcorn's party, had been by no means wholly restored, by the attentions she received at breakfast, to the self-complacency which she had lost the night before. She had even said to herself, though she could not bear to repeat it, that the effusive caresses which Lady Cornelia bestowed on her were not dissimilar to those which she might have bestowed on a pet dog. Still, Mrs. Norham contrived to think pretty well of herself, when Lady Cornelia accompanied her good-bye with a kiss; and her mental stature rose in a yet more appreciable degree when she found herself sitting on the cushions of Lord Runcorn's carriage, and looking forward to her arrival being witnessed by the eyes of her altruistic colony.

Her peace of mind, however, only partially restored as it was, was destined to be ruffled afresh by her meeting with Mr. Bousefield. When she entered the sitting-room which she and he shared, using it as a study in a kind of platonic privacy, she found him with a grim frown on his face, putting the last words, as she saw by the dash that followed them, to something or other which he had been writing. Mrs. Norham carefully adopted her most ordinary and unexcited manner. "Good morning," she said. "I was in such a hurry to get away from that place that I hardly had time for my breakfast, and must ask for a cup of coffee."

Mr. Bousefield looked up, and said "Good morning," with a forced smile. "I hope," he added, "you've been having a happy time among your grandees. Were they all of them lords and ladies? Or was there any common clay amongst them?"

"Oh," said Mrs. Norham, "the party was nice enough —

very much the sort of thing you would find any evening in London."

"I apprehend," said Mr. Bousefield, "it must have been very different from anything *I* should find there — a humble plebeian like myself. It has always," he went on, leaning back in his chair, and pushing his hands deep into his trouser pockets, "it has always — " Then he paused. He coughed two or three times ominously; and at last, as though with an effort, he said, "It has always been my rule — one, I must say, which I have been very seldom asked to break — never to enter the house of any titled person."

Mrs. Norham affected to see in this observation nothing that had any particular application to the moment. "I can quite understand your feeling," she said. "But your rule is, I think, too rigid. A few of these people I have been seeing are inclined and are able to be useful to us. I suppose, from the look of your manuscript, you have been writing your article for *The Chairman*." *The Chairman* was a weekly review, sedately and yet burningly Liberal, to which Mr. Bousefield was a valuable and weighty contributor. "What," Mrs. Norham continued, "is your subject for this week?"

Mr. Bousefield had begun to gather his brood of sheets under the motherly bosom of his waistcoat, as though fearful lest Mrs. Norham's eyes should pounce, like a hawk, upon the heading of them. He was, however, too slow for her; for this is just what her eyes did do. The heading of his article, written in bold letters, was, "Titles under Modern Democracy."

He had of late been accustomed to submit these compositions to her; and so little did false modesty obscure the clarity of her judgment that, although they were usually full of reverential references to herself, she had told him with perfect candour that she considered them very good. Accordingly, in spite of some obvious reluctance on his part, she took his manuscript from him, and proceeded to look through it.

Mr. Bousefield, whose disposition was naturally genial, unless he were called on to consider the one species of failing to which he and his friends applied the term "immorality," had never manifested hitherto anything like a gift for satire;

but nobody knows his talents till occasion calls for their employment, and Mrs. Norham, as she ran her eye over his manuscript, perceived that something or other had transformed her friend into a Juvenal. Titles, he said, at this time of day, whatever they might have been once, were now perceived by all sensible persons to unite the contemptible character of those paper crowns which children find in crackers with the pestilent character of an unacknowledged poison. Then leaping with the agility of a poet to another set of similitudes, he declared that they, with all the ideas involved in them, threw a false and misleading light over the whole social landscape. In fact, they created a series of social mirages; and they did this, said Mr. Bousefield, precisely in those places where the social soil was most nearly a desert. If a really earnest mind, he proceeded, might see a comedy in anything, few spectacles were more comic than that of human beings mistaking these visions for realities; and were it only the base and the foolish who were thus deceived, we might be content to laugh and leave fools to their folly. Unfortunately, however, this was very far from being the case. Grievous though it might be to say so, these visions, at times, deceived loftier souls — those even who were, in other respects, the loftiest; and then, though the comedy of the situation became so broad as to lose itself in the farcical, it became also a tragedy — a multiplied tragedy which involved not only the heroes or the heroines of it, but those who had admired and believed in them, and had been sustained by their high example. Such was the outline of Mr. Bousefield's argument. Mrs. Norham bit her lip, and gave the manuscript back to him.

"It is a pity," she said coldly, "that you should have written a thing like that. I fail to see the point of it."

Mr. Bousefield, who felt like a schoolboy detected in some misdemeanour, and was endeavouring to hide his confusion by lounging awkwardly in his chair, and eying the undulations of his watch-chain as it lay amongst the valleys of his waistcoat, here weakly committed the greatest blunder that was possible for him. "I hope," he said, "you don't think that the article has any — ahem — any personal application?"

"Personal!" exclaimed Mrs. Norham, in a voice of withering scorn. "Do you think I am in any danger of applying such remarks as those to myself? Is that, may I ask, what you insinuate? No! if I have spoken strongly — if I feel strongly about the matter — my feeling, I assure you, is on your account, not on my own. An article like that is altogether unworthy of you. It is unworthy of your taste; it is unworthy of your knowledge of the world; and if you will allow me to give you a hint which may save you some mortification, the editor will think it unworthy of the paper to which you propose to send it. I say this for your own good. You may believe me or not, as you like. I will not disturb you or your work. I must go now and speak to your wife."

Had Mrs. Norham's observation ever condescended to busy itself with the ways of irregular affection amongst ordinary and erring mortals, she might have noticed that when a married man discards an old mistress for a new one, the old one not infrequently makes common cause with the wife, and unites with her in lamenting how the husband "has been got hold of by that dreadful woman." Mrs. Norham's conduct, allowing for the differences of the case, was a sort of celestial reproduction of the conduct of those below her. Mrs. Bousefield was found by her in the dining-room, sitting alone as usual, with some letters, some accounts, a Bible, and *The Glasgow Herald*, together with her spectacles, disposed before her on the table; there was also an orange amongst these objects, which it seemed that the poor lady had been sucking. "Dear Mrs. Bousefield," exclaimed Mrs. Norham, "I have asked for a cup of coffee. I'm only just back. Do let me have it here."

This greeting of the prophetess was so astoundingly frank and genial that Mrs. Bousefield fancied herself dreaming. "Surely," she said to Mrs. Norham. "Will ye put your hand to the bell? I'm just glad of a little company. It's not so often I have it. And I hope you enjoyed your outing amongst the fine folks at the Villa Martin. I suppose the earl keeps a very liberal table. I'd be glad to hear about that, and the ladies' dresses, if ye're sure," said Mrs. Bousefield, with a

faint but irrepressible accent of sarcasm, "that you'd not sooner be having your coffee at your own desk in the library."

"Indeed, no!" replied Mrs. Norham, with emphasis, "your husband is there at present, and of this you may be quite sure, that he finds my room a great deal better than my company. Men, as you and I know, never really understand women; and when they don't understand them, they take refuge in finding them in the way."

Some women's hearts are won by praise of their husbands, but never was wife's heart won with so much suddenness and completeness as Mrs. Bousefield's was by this contemptuous reference to hers. In the space of a moment a load was lifted from her heart, and had she only been less shy she would have saluted Mrs. Norham with a kiss. A white-capped maid was ordered to bring the coffee to the dining-room, and meanwhile Mrs. Bousefield, in the confiding gladness of her heart, ventured to submit to Mrs. Norham some patterns of Scotch homespun which were lying on the table by her side — "which seem to me," she said, "I don't know what you'll think — so flimsy like. And yet they've been sent me here by Stuart & Maclehose of Sauchiehall Street."

The peace which brooded over these ladies seemed little short of miraculous; but Mrs. Bousefield's beatitude was not of very long duration. For its ending, however, she had only herself to thank. On Mrs. Norham's retiring to her bedroom, Mrs. Bousefield made her way, with a new warmth in her heart, to the apartment that had been named the library; and delighted with the thought that the link between her husband and Mrs. Norham was broken, and that he was once more given back to her own conjugal heart, she bestowed on his forehead, as he sat, what she had wished to bestow upon Mrs. Norham's — namely, a kiss. Mr. Bousefield received it with what he himself thought was resignation, and what he hoped Mrs. Bousefield would take for proper marital amity. But Mrs. Bousefield felt the skin of his forehead flinch a little; and her ears caught in his voice a note of suppressed irritation as he said to her, without rising, "Well, my dear, and what is it?"

"I thought," she said, struggling with an unacknowledged sense of disappointment, "that perhaps you'd be liking to hear some of the news that I've had this forenoon," and she took a chair near with the wifeliness of former days. This speech, to her delight, was far more successful than her kiss. Mr. Bousefield put down the pen which till now he had continued to hold, and he leaned forward with a smile which betokened genuine interest. "What could have happened?" he asked himself. "It must be something exciting, or else she would never have invaded his morning privacy." Any excitement would be welcome to him at that moment.

"By all means tell me," he said. "Come, my dear, I am listening." Mrs. Bousefield, thus encouraged, smiled and opened a reticule, which formed an invariable and characteristic feature of her person, and proceeded to extract from it the letter which she had just been reading. "The Donald Macleods," she said, "have just gone to St. Andrews for a fortnight's golf. Ye'll be glad to hear that she's perfectly convalescent, and she's fairly delighted with the christening gift you sent for her little boy. She says he's so bonny, you never saw the like of him. You can read what she says yourself, and oh," Mrs. Bousefield proceeded, putting one letter aside and opening out another, "here's a line from Annie Richardson, and she says that her poor mother nearly caught her death of a chill, by a very strange accident. The cork of the hot-water bottle in her bed at Edinburgh came out while she was asleep, and she woke up, Annie says, a regular sop — stone cold and coughing. Well, you can just fancy it; and Annie says that the cough hasn't left her yet. Poor body — she was always frail. However, she's fast mending. They're to be in Edinburgh all the winter, and Annie will be having some dances."

Mr. Bousefield all this while had been gradually growing fidgety, as though annoyed at so aimless a preamble to something important that was in store for him. He now heard the crackle of sheets of paper as his wife folded one letter and then opened another. "Yes, my dear — yes?" he said, in a tone which meant, "Is it impossible for you to come to the point?"

"Ah," said Mrs. Bousefield, smiling, "here's what I was wishing to show you. I'm sure you'll be pleased to hear about little Sandy, your godchild — he's only four — and his battle with his aunt's turkey — 'the naughty bubbly-jock' — that was what Sandy called him."

But Mr. Bousefield's patience was exhausted. "My dear," he exclaimed, pronouncing the word "dear" with that intensity which converts it into an equivalent for "you absolutely intolerable person," — "My dear," he said, "do you seriously mean to tell me that you have come here and interrupted me in the middle of most important work — most arduous work — that you have made me lose the thread of my calculations, and forced me to add up again three columns of figures, merely for the sake of telling me about Sandy MacPherson and a bubbly-jock? No doubt it's very amusing; but I wish, my dear, you could manage to teach yourself that I have many serious duties and many subjects of thought, which are none the less important to me — and, indeed, to others — because you would find them uninteresting, and because I forbear to inflict them on you. I must really beg you, my dear, to leave me undisturbed till luncheon, and if you will tell me about the bubbly-jock then, I will listen without wincing." So saying, Mr. Bousefield took up his pen, dipped it in the ink, and bent over a sheet of foolscap. His wife looked at him for a moment. Her lips quivered a little, something began to glisten in her eyes. She rose and hurried from the room.

The situation thus created lasted for two days. Mrs. Norham remained, so far as Mr. Bousefield was concerned, shut up in her own dignity; whilst he, for his part, did his best to appear preoccupied, and to have forgotten Mrs. Norham in the details of the Tibbits' Motor, drawings of which he pretended to be always studying. This, however, was a game at which Mrs. Norham could play better than he. She began to affect more than usual the society of Mr. Squelch, whose volume of immortal poems was just about to be published, and who was consequently so agitated at the thought of his own greatness that he had had to seek support in the *absinthe* of a neighbouring *cabaret*. His palate being spoilt for anything

less fiery, he had been wholly unable to attend to the conversation of anybody till Mrs. Norham's praise of his genius made *absinthe* seem as weak as tea. Mrs. Norham, moreover, had got another arrow in her quiver, Mr. Bousefield having but one, and this was her effusiveness to his wife; whilst as for Mrs. Bousefield herself, though her husband was still estranged from her, and though her late visions of happiness had been so instantly clouded over, she was still able to perceive that he was estranged from Mrs. Norham also, and had thus more to console her than either of the two others.

So long, however, as matters remained in this position, they were in unstable equilibrium. They were bound to rearrange themselves; and in due time they did so. The change, like most moral changes, was due to two sets of causes — the first, and naturally the most powerful, being considerations of the highest kind; whilst the second were considerations of poor human convenience, which happened to coincide with the first, and lent them their humble aid without even wishing to be recognised. In other words, Mr. Bousefield and Mrs. Norham each began to reflect, when alone with their respective consciences, that those whose distinctive creed was a passionate love of everybody — a love passing that which forms the poor ideal of the Christian — were hardly acting up to their own lofty standard by indulging, on account of a trifle, in a childish hatred of one another. But the workings of conscience, which, however sure, were slow, were accelerated, and were that possible made even more efficacious, by motives belonging to a somewhat less exalted plane.

In the first place, as had appeared from Mr. Bousefield's communication to Lacy, events were proceeding rapidly in connection with the Tibbits' Motor. Mr. Dundas Poulton having been made secretary of the Syndicate, he had not only refused, on high socialistic grounds, to receive as salary more than five hundred a year, though he actually engaged to work for four hours a day — the ideal maximum, so he put it, of daily human effort; but he had, also, secured a magnificent suite of offices, these comprising two rooms for himself, so that he might always be on the spot to spend and be spent for

others; and he had actually not shrunk from the labour of choosing the furniture himself — even such uninteresting articles as his own Indian carpets. The patenting of the great invention, with all its subordinate details, had by this time been completed; and one of the highest legal authorities had given his written opinion that of all the patents which he had ever been called upon to consider, he had come across none so safe from all danger of being infringed or contested. Mr. Tibbits was not only ready with a number of working drawings, but he had made a small model of a bicycle, fitted with his auxiliary motor, the wheels of which spun deliciously with mysterious little electrical crepitations, and which his hands, hollowed by having been clenched so frequently in defiance of capital, were never weary of turning. The workshops for the provisional manufacture of the epoch-making invention were secured; and Mr. Tibbits in a few days would have to return to London, in order to engage workmen and superintend some alterations in the plant. Matters are not pushed forward thus without a liberal expenditure of money; and there would, it appeared, be shortly a fresh call on the shareholders. It was, therefore, of the utmost importance that Mr. Bousefield and Mrs. Norham should consult each other; and this was the case more especially because Mr. Bousefield was coming to the conclusion that it would shortly be advisable for him to return to London himself, and leave the altruists at St. Antoine under the charge of Mrs. Norham and of his wife. But there was another matter of yet more pressing, if not of greater, importance, which required consultation also, of an equally intimate kind. This was the forthcoming service, which was to be held under exceptional circumstances. Two of the most solemn and altruistic of the friends of Mr. Bousefield and Mrs. Norham were a briefless barrister and a doctor without patients, whose eyes had been sufficiently purged by the discipline of professional disappointment to discern that the whole body of society required some organic change. These gentlemen, having each a small independence, on which they could cultivate at leisure the higher forms of discontent, had not only engaged to lecture at Startfield Hall,

but had also seen their way to secure for themselves a well-earned holiday, without the extravagance of paying for it, by arranging, and personally conducting, a party of some thirty altruists on a strictly economical tour through the cities of Northern Italy; and they proposed on their homeward journey to give their clients a sight of the Riviera by halting them for a night at St. Estéphe, and bringing them on a pilgrimage to Mrs. Norham. This Mrs. Norham and Mr. Bousefield both recognised as a great opportunity for the sublime church of the future; and Mrs. Norham was dreaming of improving the occasion further by inveigling, by Lacy's aid, a fashionable contingent from St. Hilaire, on whom, as she towered before them, as the youngest daughter of fame, she might avenge herself, by her sacred ministrations, for the slights they had presumed to put upon her. About all these points it was essential that she and Mr. Bousefield should take counsel.

Such being the case, then, both of them came to feel what an inconvenient thing it was to be out of temper with the person with whom, for practical reasons, confidential intercourse was most desirable. It happened, therefore, that one morning Mr. Bousefield, whose strong vein of gentlemanly feeling urged him to take on himself the humiliation of the first overture, came into the sitting-room which he had been accustomed to share with Mrs. Norham, but which of late they had never occupied at the same moment. He came into the room, having seen her through the window at her desk; and, all his pockets swelling with letters about the Tibbits' Motor, he said, "Mrs. Norham, there is something I've been desirous of telling you. I've committed that article of mine, on which you passed such severe strictures, to the flames. I will be honest with you, though it goes against myself. I have realised that your strictures were just. For certain persons — persons such as yourself, for instance — it is right that they should see and study every kind of society — even that lowest section of it which is ironically called the highest. You, for instance, can move in it with profound dignity, never forgetting your own superiority to every member of it; and I am convinced that if any tuft-hunting takes place at all, it is

society that will be toadying you, not you who will be toadying society. Mrs. Norham, will you shake hands with me, and let bygones be bygones?"

Mrs. Norham rose and faced him. An honest and relenting light dawned slowly in her brown eyes. Her large lips smiled, and then trembled into a pleasant laugh. She held out her hand to him. He grasped it; and the act of reconciliation was accomplished.

"Well," began Mr. Bousefield, settling himself amicably in a chair, "I told you I'd heard from Mr. Lacy. He would rather not have those shares. I'm sorry for it for his own sake. I don't think he understands what an opportunity he is letting slip."

"Mr. Lacy," said Mrs. Norham, "is, of course, not a man of science."

"Well," said Mr. Bousefield, "they will be taken up by my wife. I've got to the end of my tether, so far as my own means go — especially as Poulton — he's working as hard as he can for us — wants time, he says, for paying his second call."

More discourse followed with regard to the same subject; and they then addressed themselves to the question of the impending service. A day was readily settled, which they gathered would suit their friends — that is to say, the band of travelling altruists. Mrs. Norham, however, though she had others in view also, yet dreading to discompose Mr. Bousefield by the mention of what he called "titled" persons, determined to introduce her contingent without alarming and forewarning him.

"I suppose," she said, with an air of heroic resignation, "you will desire, as heretofore, the introduction of some theistic prayers."

"For my wife's sake," said Mr. Bousefield, gravely, "and for the sake of many others, I should be very loth to dispense with them. Mrs. Bousefield has never been divided from me in religious worship yet. So long as I respect her wishes in this high matter — indeed, they are my own also — I shall never have to reproach myself with not having done my duty to her."

That day, at luncheon-time, Mrs. Bousefield, who was already in the dining-room, felt her temples grow suddenly cold as she saw Mrs. Norham and her husband enter, not, indeed, with their arms round each other's waist, but still so objectionably near to each other that it seemed as if Mrs. Norham was being gently propelled into the room by the pressure of Mr. Bousefield behind her; whilst she was speaking to him over her shoulder with a kind of private animation which proclaimed their intimate partnership in a hoard of private interests.

"Well, my dear," said Mr. Bousefield cheerily to his wife, "and what dainties, I wonder, are you going to give us to-day. Something good, I'll be bound — something good, as usual, or even better, perhaps."

Mrs. Bousefield was very far from being a woman of the world. She knew nothing about lovers and liaisons in the common acceptation of the words; but she divined as clearly as she could have done had she been the heroine of a Parisian novel, what the source of Mr. Bousefield's geniality was; and a piece of knowledge became hers to which Balzac could have added nothing — that no unkindness from a husband to a wife is so wounding as the kindness which springs out of the happiness brought to him by another woman.

CHAPTER XXIV

While all these momentous events had been taking place at St. Antoine, the drama of Lacy's life had been less marked in its development. As soon as he had found himself alone on Lord Runcorn's terrace with Miss St. Germans, the many things which he had fancied he was longing to say to her had dwindled into nothing but expressions of protecting and sympathetic friendship. How could he, he asked himself, being what he was, offer himself to one so fresh and so young as she? It was not his age that gave him this recurring sense of unfitness for her; nor the sense that she was innocent whilst he was much the reverse. His errors might have sullied him for the time, but they certainly had not stained him. What he saw and feared in himself was a blackness far deeper than the frailties of the flesh can produce on any but the most depraved. It was not the blackness of a stain, but the blackness of a gaping chasm. Such a chasm, it seemed to him, was his own heart of hearts, filled with the worst of darkness — the darkness of blank indifference; and if to a heart like this he were really to bring a child, he would be playing the part reversed of the spectre in the German ballad, and carrying off a faithful bride, not a faithless lover, to a tomb.

Such, at least, were the misgivings with regard to his own character. He accordingly had shrunk with a sensitiveness which the most immaculate of his sex might have envied, from taking the least advantage of the feelings of a girl so young, or of yielding to his own till he more thoroughly understood them; and he hailed with delight the events of the next two or three days, as they had the precise effect which the girl had foreseen and dreaded, of making any private companionship between him and her impracticable.

On the morning after Lord Runcorn's party, luncheon at the Château des Fleurs was hardly over before at the front door was heard the stamping of horses and the loud ringing of a bell; and presently Lady Madeleine was informed that Lady Dovedale wished to speak to her. "I will go to her," said Lacy, "and ask her to come in;" and a minute later, puffing a little with the exertion of getting out of the carriage, and saying to her conductor, "I can smell how good your coffee is: I positively insist on having some," Lady Dovedale was introduced into the dining-room. "Madeleine, you old dear," said her mother, still breathless, "I'm glad to see you. Yes, dear; take off my boa. Ah, Mrs. St. Germans, to see you makes me feel quite young again. We haven't met since the year of the exhibition in Paris. And who's this young lady? What do you say? — Estelle? My dear, when I saw you last, you were an awkward little thing, that high. You're not awkward now. Well," Lady Dovedale continued, beginning to drink her coffee, "we only arrived last night — Mrs. Helbeckstein and myself. I heard you'd a party last night in the Villa Martin; and it seems to me that we ve seen half London already. By the way, Madeleine, you'll be filling Mr. Lacy's house with visitors. Who should meet me on the way here but Lady Tregothran? She too arrived last night, and she's coming this afternoon to see you." When they went into the drawing-room, Lady Dovedale inspected the view; and informed Lacy in her level but jerky tones, that he must let her one day bring her host and hostess to look at it. "They're naturally," she said, laughing, "particular about scenery. I suppose they could buy all the finest views in Europe."

She hardly had finished speaking when one of the servants entered, following and announced by whom was the literary ex-Ambassador. He was in his turn succeeded by other callers, amongst them being Lady Cornelia, with Cyril Watson in attendance on her. A Sunday afternoon in London could have been scarcely more alive with conversation: and Lady Madeleine, after half-an-hour's absence, re-entered the drawing-room at tea-time, said a few words to her host, and brought in Lady Tregothran.

The following day Lacy gave an impromptu lunch. Mrs. Helbeckstein, hearing of this, insisted that Lady Dovedale should take her to see the château before the party had separated; and, although she missed the Prime Minister, who had had to depart early, she successfully forced herself on the acquaintance of his sister and of Lady Tregothran; whilst she ended by inviting the whole of the company present to a picnic which her husband had been arranging for some days past.

The Helbecksteins, indeed, became the life of the little colony of St. Hilaire; and there was no one who in the future might be of any possible use to them whom they did not do their best to court, to flatter, or to patronise. Lacy, whom Mrs. Helbeckstein had so despised when she had first seen him in the refreshment-room, now stood high amongst those who, for the present at all events, should be courted. For Mrs. Helbeckstein was a woman who willingly wronged no one. If she had snubbed a man for a whole season, not thinking it worth while to be civil to him, yet the moment she discovered him to be a little more fashionable than she imagined, she at once divested herself of every previous prejudice against him, and began to behave to him in accordance with his true deserts. Lacy received the full benefit of this fine trait in her character; and her attentions to himself and to his friends were soon even greater than he desired.

Mrs. Helbeckstein, indeed, began to feel that she had fallen on her feet. The beautiful mistress of Tregothran House — the entertainer of so many royalties — was at last numbered amongst her acquaintances. So also was the great Prime Minister's sister, whom, with true impartiality, she admired first for her rudeness to herself, and a day later for her civility, on receiving a note from her in which, on Lord Runcorn's behalf, Mr. and Mrs. Helbeckstein were invited to the Villa Martin. All this had happened within twenty-four hours of her arrival. Mrs. Helbeckstein yielded to the spell of the enchanting climate, and in the little leisure she allowed herself enjoyed a succession of day-dreams, in which one by one she struck her old friends out of her visiting-list, and felt herself

able to wonder how such people had ever dared to speak to her.

Nor was Mr. Helbeckstein employed less felicitously. The two had the same spirit. They had, however, a diversity of gifts. Whilst she pushed the family fortunes with the tact of a social diplomatist, he, ever since he had bought his house in London, had been seeking to second her endeavours by the arts of a man of gallantry: for long meditation had convinced him that the best way to assist his wife was to shine himself as the lover of the ladies whom she desired as friends. If he could not be well-born he might at least become well-connected. Nor indeed for a beginner had he been thus far unsuccessful. During his second London season one of the most beautiful women of the day was so far won by the dangerous charm of his personality as to consent to make use of his carriage, to appear with him in his box at the opera, and to let it be known that she was in the habit of dining *tête-à-tête* with him, in return for an adherence on his part to the rules of the Platonic philosophy, and a present, delicately made her, of six thousand pounds. Aided by the prestige of this partial conquest, he proceeded to attempt others, which he hoped to render more complete; and the following season the box-seat of his coach was occupied in rotation by three fashionable ladies, who, if not exactly without visible means of subsistence, were at all events without visible means of dressing as they habitually did, and who all had the credit of having surrendered their characters to his keeping. A less sensible man than he might have been made vain by such a series of successes, especially as, in spite of his sixty years, and his large financial nose, he was, with his well-trimmed moustache, sufficiently removed from ugliness, to enable him, when he stood before the glass, to fancy that he was good-looking. But the modest opinion he retained of his own personal fascinations was evidenced by the fact that, not even in his most impassioned wooings, did he presume to rely on these personal fascinations alone. He invariably supplemented them by such gifts or services as great wealth enables a man to offer to those he loves. He acquired, moreover, in offering these,

very considerable skill, or what came to the same thing, as much skill as was requisite; and he had soon thoroughly convinced himself that when these were not taken amiss, the time would presently arrive when very little else would be.

A couple such as this, whose one immediate object was to make themselves indispensable to as many important people as happened at the time to be within the reach of their influence, gave an instant vitality to social life at St. Hilaire. The picnic was as great a success as beautiful weather and scenery, the finest wines, the freshest *pâté de foie gras*, and the labour-saving attentions of Mrs. Helbeckstein's footmen could make it. And to this entertainment various others succeeded. At Mrs. Helbeckstein's villa was an excellent lawn-tennis court, which she placed at the disposal of everybody whom she knew or wished to know. She begged them to lunch with her whenever they were disposed to play, and to dine with her whenever they were not disposed to lunch; and she spoke of a concert and a possible *cotillon* at the casino. This movement naturally extended itself to the inhabitants of the Château des Fleurs; nor did Miss St. Germans, after she had experienced a little of it, find it quite so distasteful as she had anticipated. She enjoyed the picnic; she enjoyed the lawn-tennis even more; and the mention of the *cotillon* made her feel in her feet a longing to dance which had for some time been forgotten by them.

It was this sort of life which enabled Lacy's intimacy with her to prolong itself, and retain its freshness, without changing its character. And yet at the same time, in various subtle ways, it tended to strengthen the hold which she had already acquired on his imagination. In the first place it restored him himself to a healthier mood of mind. It closed the mouth, if it did not actually fill up, the chasm of indifference, of whose existence he had been so painfully conscious in himself. It placed him in constant contact with the common things of life; and as he still found Miss St. Germans just as attractive as ever, he began to feel greater respect for the feelings he was tempted to entertain for her. There were other influences also which contributed to the same result. As he

watched the girl moving amongst new acquaintances, he saw new images of her reflected in the impression she made on others. He had never, he felt, realised how exceptional was her mere worldly gracefulness till he saw the stare of admiration with which Mrs. Helbeckstein, that keen social valuer, had greeted her when she first set eyes on her in the drawing-room of the Château des Fleurs.

But there was somebody else whose appreciation of the young lady stimulated Lacy's feelings for her, even more than did Mrs. Helbeckstein's. This was Cyril Watson. He was a young man with that natural charm of manner which Ministers for Foreign Affairs find so invaluable in a secretary. In Cyril Watson's attentions to Miss St. Germans, Lacy detected, or thought he detected, a feeling with which he could well sympathise, and which only needed encouragement to turn into one which would resemble his own, and be fresher, though less deep. The encouragement, however, so far as he could see, was wanting; and yet when at luncheon or dinner, as very frequently happened, the girl was by the young man's side, and he was himself at some distance from her, he would find himself, if her voice reached him, almost incapable of hearing anything else, and wholly incapable of conversing coherently with his neighbours.

And then, when he and his little party were once more by themselves, when the woods of the Château des Fleurs, and the gorge spanned by its bridge, shut them out from the world, and left them with no other companions than the sea which murmured below them, and the flowers of their headlong garden, his chosen companion would seem to him more his own than ever, because of the chance suggested that others might take her from him. Whilst never allowing himself to neglect his work for her sake, — and business of all kinds pursued him here from England, demanding from him week by week increasing care and attention, — it yet became part of his regular morning programme to sit with her for an hour or so, whilst she painted in the garden, or on one of the balconies. As she worked he would talk to her: and her few days of intercourse with the world seemed to him to have added a new charm to

her, and to have given her a mental self-confidence which he had not perceived before.

One day he said to her, "Of course we have all experienced that nothing brings back the past to us like the recurrence of some remembered smell — of wall-flowers, of dried rose-leaves, or the peat smoke of some Highland cottage. Could you only paint smells as well as colours, you might make pictures from which all our past would always come floating back to us, as if your paper or canvas were a sort of inexhaustible censer."

In his own observation there was nothing particularly original, but her answer seemed to show in her a precocious stimulation of thought. "I wish I could tell," she said, "what painting means for me. When people try to describe in words the meanings that are conveyed to them by music, they tell you about scenery, sunsets, colours — the things that are expressed by painting. When they try to describe to you the meanings that are conveyed to them by painting, they begin, and so should I, to talk to you in terms of music. If you question one art, it sends you on to another. Then this second art refers you back to the first; and there always remains some secret, which they seem sworn to conceal between them. Is life like that? I sometimes think it must be. Is it always a chase for something which you cannot find, and which, when you have chased it till you are old, doubles back again and hides itself in youth?"

"I think," said Lacy, in a tone which he tried not to make too serious, "there is one — perhaps there are two — experiences in which it may be run to earth. One is religion."

"And the other?" she said.

He looked up at her and answered, "You will perhaps know that some day."

After all, he told himself, she might be less a child than he had thought, and the void in his own heart might be less incapable of being filled. He looked back over his past life, and saw, in the days of his poverty, how often he had longed to marry, could he have given a wife a home. He saw himself watching his friends, as they married, one by one, and regarding them like a beggar who passes along a wintry street,

and peers through the windows at the lighted hearths within. But now fortune had at last worked in his favour. Now at last could he find a woman to marry him, incredible as it seemed, he had actually a home to offer her — a home and a lot which no one need disdain to share with him. Owing to the necessity which circumstances had lately imposed on him of passing much of his time on the social surface of life, where the sunny ripples prevented him from examining what lay below, he had been but imperfectly conscious of how these thoughts had been maturing in him. But the same day on which she had exchanged with him her ideas about the meaning of art, — a day, it may be added, on which Mr. Cyril Watson had quoted to her more poetry than Lacy thought strictly necessary, — that same day saw him come at last to a resolution. He would on the first opportunity ask the girl to marry him. He would do so that very evening, so he at first promised himself, but he suddenly recollected that unfortunately on that evening he and his three guests were to dine at the Villa Martin. However, he reflected that next morning would do equally well; and such was his mood of mind when he betook himself to his uncle's party.

CHAPTER XXV

The guests that night were such and even so numerous that when the Poodle, who heard everything, sent an account of the dinner to the papers, it formed the best advertisement for St. Hilaire that had yet appeared anywhere; and Mr. Davis gave him a cheque for twenty-five pounds as an acknowledgment. Lady Tregothran was there, queenly with her celebrated tiara. Lady Flotsam was there, with a lovelier complexion than ever, which threw a dazzling veil over the reluctant operations of the years. There also were Lady Scarva and her husband — the millionnaire representative of equality, who were now on their way to the restorative air of Monte Carlo in order to nerve themselves for new battles against privilege; whilst better dressed than anybody, holding herself more upright, and looking about her with more supercilious eyes, was Mrs. Helbeckstein, ably supported by her husband, whose evening clothes were of an almost supernatural neatness, and who, having had in his youth clean linen but once a week, now, wherever he went, had his shirts washed in Paris. Together with them, Lady Dovedale was naturally present also; though Mrs. Helbeckstein, having heard somebody say that Lady Dovedale was vulgar, was already looking forward to the time when she would be able to repeat the observation.

But charming and distinguished as all these guests were, they were in some respects thrown into the shade by another — a lady, who that very afternoon had arrived at the Villa Martin, bringing with her a well-dressed and attractive daughter. This lady was none other than Mrs. Tilney, who appeared to know most of those present better than they knew themselves, and who moved amongst them cementing them with a

kind of social mortar. Little as many of them had really in common with herself, she was always ready with some pertinent question, which at once put her *en rapport* with any one — man or woman — whom interest, civility, or kindness prompted her to address. Though absolutely ignorant of racing, she remembered the names of racehorses and the dates of various meetings well enough to talk scandal intelligibly to any of those brilliant beings whose heart's home is at Newmarket; and she was able, within the same ten minutes, to discuss the same elopement gravely and sadly with a bishop, and gaily with Lady Tregothran. And yet all the while those who knew her were well aware that she preserved a persistent and unimpeachable character of her own. No one could have been more shocked at the thought of being suspected of any of the frailties which, when her friends were guilty of them, she treated with such vivacious leniency; nor could any one who knew anything of Mrs. Tilney's dealings with the poor — and few women were more philanthropic than she — have set down this leniency as a sign of moral indifference; for treating the poor as she did, with the feelings of the ideal Christian — that is to say, treating them precisely as she would treat herself — she was as severe upon their moral failings as she would have been on her own, had she had any, and as active as she could have been in her own case in attempting to mitigate their consequences. Her charity indeed was so great that she found it necessary to divide it — giving her charity of action to the poor, and her charity of judgment to the rich.

It fell to Lacy this evening to take her in to dinner; and, as at the other side of her sat Sir Reginald Flotsam, he could realise, when she talked to Sir Reginald, the versatility of her character, and when she talked to himself, its beauty.

Sir Reginald was one of those happy men who reach the age of seventy without any suspicion that they are a day over five-and-thirty. Next to his judgment on matters connected with the turf, the quality on which he most prided himself was his judgment of female beauty; and as he drove down Piccadilly the highest-stepping horse in London, there was hardly a female face or a female waist worth looking at which escaped

the eyes that glittered under the curled brim of his hat. He was also in his own estimation one of the most accomplished epicures of the day, and was much addicted, when not dining at home, to confidential and caustic criticisms of the delicacies put before him. Accordingly, when he had swallowed two spoonfuls of soup, he muttered to Mrs. Tilney, "Excellent, if it weren't half cold. It's curious how many good dinners are spoilt — shall I tell you why? — simply because architects can't plan a good serving-room. By the way," he continued, when by this penetrating observation he had, as he felt, done himself justice as a *gourmet*, "who in the world is that — the beautiful apparition in white? There she is — there — two from your other neighbour. Did you ever see such a complexion? And it's every bit of it real. I can tell that from here," he added, with the air of an expert.

"It's more than I can," said Mrs. Tilney; and she proceeded to finish her rejoinder with a remark which exhibited one of the defects of her qualities. She had so many rejoinders ready for every occasion that she would sometimes slip one out without sufficient selection. She did so now. "But you," she said, "know so much more about false complexions than I do that I really will not presume to dispute the matter with you." Mrs. Tilney was aware that a man of Sir Reginald's character means, generally, by knowledge of women, a knowledge of what is false in them; and she intended to pay him a compliment such as his soul loved. It was not till the words were well out of her mouth that she remembered the complexion of Sir Reginald's own wife. Sir Reginald remembered it too, so Mrs. Tilney saw. He was angrily uncertain as to whether she had meant to remind him of it. He could hardly believe she had; but she had reminded him that he was a married man, and he disliked this even more than reflections on his wife's colouring. So with one or two clearings of his throat he let the conversation drop, and turned to Lady Dovedale, whom he had taken in to dinner, and who was already avenging his neglect of her by reciting to herself his faults and foibles — a process which had placed her on a frozen moral pinnacle, from which she experienced some difficulty in descending.

Mrs. Tilney, thus freed from the attentions of Sir Reginald, turned to Lacy and murmured, "He really is too dreadful."

"I couldn't help," replied Lacy, "catching something of what he was saying. Wasn't he asking you something about Miss St. Germans?"

"Is that Miss St. Germans?" said Mrs. Tilney, with quiet curiosity. "I've been hearing about her already from Cornelia and Lord Runcorn both. How beautiful she is, and what a charming expression! Well, Mr. Lacy, I now no longer wonder that you should think a post on the Riviera better than a post in Egypt."

"I have never," said Lacy, "met with a girl so young who is at once so mature and so innocent. Indeed, when you are with her, you forget you are talking to a child. You only remember that she is a child because she has none of the faults of age."

"It seems to me," said Mrs. Tilney, "that the young ladies of the present day only differ from children because they have all the faults of age."

She paused for a moment after this ferocious utterance, and then went on softly: "Norah is naturally so sympathetic that, going about in the world as much as she does, I am specially anxious about the girls with whom she may form intimacies. It's from girls in these days, far more than from men, that girls get the ideas which so often make marriages miserable. Many people, of course, declaim against marrying early; but I confess I think that if a girl can find a nice good man for a husband, the sooner she marries and has a home of her own the better. When she is able to exert her proper influence in society, when she has friends and dependents to whom she owes constant duties, it is absurd to say, as so many people whom we know do say, that her life can ever be empty, or that she will require any of the wicked excitements — wicked is an old-fashioned word, but I really can use no other — to which even girls nowadays avow that they look forward."

"I," said Lacy, "should argue for a late marriage rather than an early one; because the later, within reason, an imagi-

native woman marries, the less time is left her to outgrow her illusions with regard to it."

Something of the bitterness secreted during his unhappy years made itself audible in Lacy's voice as he spoke; and he had hardly ceased before he became aware that the eyes of Miss St. Germans were fixed on him, full of a vague inquiry. Confused by a fear that she had overheard him, he gave all his attention to Mrs. Tilney.

"Yes," she answered him; "but the marriages you speak of are the very marriages which I say do all the mischief. They are the worldly marriages — the marriages of sale and barter; and it's from girls, I say, far more than from men, that girls learn their worldliness. My own child has never been spoilt in that way. She will be quite content to pass two-thirds of the year entertaining her friends at her husband's place in the country, and doing her duty in a quiet and useful way; and four months' racket in London — or even less — will more than satisfy her simple taste for society."

"At all events," said Lacy, "you may rest satisfied that your daughter's unworldliness will be never corrupted by Miss St. Germans."

"Let us all have a talk after dinner," said Mrs. Tilney, somewhat hastily, as with a pleasant, intimate smile she turned away from Lacy, and said across the table, which was not a very wide one, to Lord Tregothran: "Did I hear you say you were going to Monte Carlo? So are we, next week. Let us make an expedition together; and Lord Crowborough shall give us luncheon at the last new thing in restaurants."

Lacy, left to himself, for his other neighbour was occupied, found his attention fixing itself on Miss St. Germans, who was separated from him only by a yard and a half of tablecloth. It was but now and then that he allowed himself to look directly at her. He feared to embarrass her by making her feel that she was being watched by him, but once or twice, for a moment, he caught her eyes, and in these brief glances of hers he thought he detected something of that perplexed inquiry with which she had regarded him a little while ago. He felt that she had seen in him, when he was talking to Mrs.

Tilney, some new side to his character of which she herself knew nothing. At the same time also, he, with regard to her, was conscious of a feeling not wholly dissimilar. She had to-night, as had often happened of late, been taken in to dinner by Cyril Watson — an event the recurrence of which was partially explicable by the fact that the arrangement of such matters was in the hands of the young secretary himself; and he was talking to her in a manner which, in spite of its diplomatic restraint, hinted that for him she was the only woman in the room. Lacy had no wish to overhear them; but his ears, without his leave, acquired an abnormal sharpness, and would now and then inform him that Cyril Watson was talking to her about poetry, art, travelling, or the ruined cities of antiquity — topics which, with a girl like her, were all conducive to intimacy — questioning her as to her tastes, when not describing his own; whilst one or two of his observations showed that he had arrived at the point of offering to throw light on his by lending her his own poems.

Lacy's attention, however, was by and by distracted by events which were taking place in a different quarter of the table. On one side of Lord Tregothran, and opposite Mrs. Tilney, was Mrs. Helbeckstein, who had been making such good use of her opportunities that she had created in her neighbourhood a silence of which she was herself the heroine, and which served as a background to her own incisive voice. She had apparently been consulting Lord Tregothran about something which she was anxious to secure — a nice house, and a little shooting, near London. Lord Tregothran mentioned to her several well-known properties; but she treated them all with such supreme contempt that at last in despair he referred her to her other neighbour. The conversation that ensued attracted a number of listeners. Various "nice houses, with a little shooting, near London," were suggested to her by various voices. But she had the satisfaction of ultimately silencing them all, by leaving them with the conviction that of the sort of nice house she wanted there could be but one specimen, and that this must be Windsor Castle. Lord Tregothran, however, who was a famous shot, made a

note in his mind of her ideas about the shooting; and foreseeing himself a conqueror in a new world of pheasants, offered her his services in securing for her something satisfactory. It occurred to him, indeed, that he had a property of his own in Kent; and he began to wonder whether, as he phrased it, "he could not stick her with that." Delighted at having enrolled in her train a person of such social importance, Mrs. Helbeckstein went on to consult him about the arrangement of houses in London; she described her own, mentioned the dimensions of her concert-room, and hinted at the entertainments which would next season be given in it.

Lord Tregothran, however, owing to the ceaseless activity of his wife, saw so much society that he was himself heartily sick of it; and he answered Mrs. Helbeckstein with an almost contemptuous apathy that people in search of gaiety might find the coming season dull, as events seemed to portend that the Court would be then in mourning.

"Oh," said Mrs. Helbeckstein, shrugging her shoulders, "de Court! What does de Court ever do? De Royalties should give more entertainments — balls, fêtes, garden-parties. Dat's what I say, Lord Runcorn. I should like to know what else we pay dem for."

Mrs. Helbeckstein had just enunciated this piece of political philosophy, when Lady Cornelia caught Lady Tregothran's eye. Chairs were then pushed back, to the music of rustling trains, and the two sexes separated, each to enjoy the discussion of that diminishing number of topics which they do not discuss together.

When the men re-entered the drawing-room, they saw it gracefully decorated by ladies clustered together in two or three coloured groups, like flowers arranged artlessly in so many separate glasses. One of these groups was composed of Lady Tregothran and Mrs. Tilney, in filial proximity to the latter of whom was her daughter, and closely attached to her daughter, by a ligament of whispers, was Miss St. Germans. But as Lacy slowly approached them, a figure glided before him — the figure of Mr. Cyril Watson; and Mr. Cyril Watson, stooping to the two seated young ladies, breathed some potent

spell in their ears, at which they jumped up and followed him. The eyes, though not the feet, of Lacy followed Mr. Watson also, and he saw, in a second drawing-room, a bevy of other girls who looked as if they had just arrived; and beyond them was Lady Cornelia, standing at one of the doors, and welcoming some young men, who were in the very act of arriving. As Lacy saw Miss St. Germans join her sisters in age, she seemed to him to become years younger, and to have almost slipped back to the schoolroom.

"Mr. Watson," he heard somebody say close to him, "has been getting up a little dance, as a surprise for Miss Tilney and Miss St. Germans. He has scraped together a dozen couples, and Lady Cornelia is going to play for them."

"Damn Mr. Watson," said Lacy, under his breath; but he was saved from the sin of repeating the imprecation by the voice of Lady Tregothran, who had been watching him for the last few moments.

"Here, Mr. Lacy," she said, her usually haughty mouth assuming an expression of *camaraderie*, "here is a chair for you. Come and tell us all about it."

"About what?" asked Lacy, drawing the chair towards her.

"Is it true," said Lady Tregothran, "as Mrs. Tilney tells us, that you have given up politics because you feel you have exhausted life?"

"What part of life do you mean?" Lacy retorted — "its realities or its dreams?"

"As for its dreams," said Lady Tregothran, "we have all of us done with them. What we want to talk to you about is a most prosaic reality. Will you stand for the seat that will be vacant next June in Manchester? The present member has agreed to hold on for a month or two; so you won't be hurried. Of course you've not heard what has happened to our poor friend," and she named the Tory politician whose restoration to Parliament she and Mrs. Tilney had been plotting before they left London. "He has had — Mrs. Tilney heard it a few minutes ago by telegram — a stroke of paralysis, and will never — poor fellow — be himself again."

"It's terribly sad," said Mrs. Tilney, with genuine feeling.

"Of course," said Lady Tregothran, "we know what finished him up. It was neither more nor less than that new restaurant in St. James's Street. It's a pity that a man's mouth, which made his fortune when he spoke with it, should have unmade his fortune when he ate with it. And now the question is, will you step into his shoes?"

"If it's merely a question of my own pleasure," said Lacy, "I should certainly answer no. But if it should turn out that there was nobody else forthcoming — "

"My dear man," interposed Lady Tregothran, "there'll be three or four people forthcoming, if you've no wish that the party should choose you first. But tell me — have you no ambition? Hark — there's that wretched piano. Come out on the terrace with me. Mrs. Tilney's so upset by this news, that she's hardly up to talking about it."

She rose, and he followed her; but turned to cast, as he did so, a glance at Miss St. Germans, as though taking an unwilling leave of her.

"Look here," said Lady Tregothran, when he and she were on the terrace, "I am going to do you a kindness which you will look in vain for from anybody else in the world. I am going to speak to you plainly." She fixed her brilliant eyes on him. "Will you," she said, "object to me, if I announce myself as your candid friend? Your uncle, my dear man, is a very old friend of mine; and, through him, I know more about you and your character than you suppose. You are a mental invalid. You are capable of doing anything, but you have managed to persuade yourself that nothing is worth doing; and now that you are rich, and fancy you have the world at your feet, you are more confirmed in this idea than ever. From some points of view, no doubt you are right enough; but from another, which is bound sooner or later to be your own, you will find, unless you get the better of your present mood, that you have been wrong. Look at me — am I inactive? Do I allow my husband to be inactive? And yet, do you think that any one of the things we aim at seems to me, in itself, to be worth the trouble it costs us? It does not; but I can tell you this, that if you take a back seat in life, simply

because you despise the play which you would look at if you took a front one, you will find that the heads which impede your view are a prospect compared with which the worst play is a masterpiece. Think of your uncle. His judgment of human life, as a whole, is not more flattering, I daresay, than yours or mine; but still every moment of his life is full, is vivid — blood beats in it. It is enlarged by the interests and issues of which he knows himself to be the centre, even when he is patting my hand, and fancying that I am half in love with him. Well, you don't say anything, but you show your sense by listening to me; and if you want me to appeal to your vanity as well as to your ambition, I don't mind telling you this — that of all possible candidates, our poor friend being incapacitated, you would be by far the best. In a constituency like this, where there is a good deal of radical feeling, it of course was a great point immensely in his favour that he was a lord; but Lacy of Lacy, within twelve miles of Manchester, would be as good any day as the younger son of a duke. Think, then, of this new opportunity of entering public life; and you and I will talk of it again in a day or two. And now, as we are enjoying ourselves by the light of this romantic moon, if you are anxious, as I think you are, in spite of all disillusion, to weave into the pattern of your career some of the tinsel or some of the silver of romance, I could one of these days put my hand on a wife who would just suit you; but — but — but — come, let us go back to the drawing-room — that wife should not be a child."

The sudden confusion caused in him by this last observation made him only too glad to obey her, and he followed her, making no reply. But instead of forgetting her words, he was destined, a moment later, to have them burnt into his mind, as though traced in it by a hot needle. On re-entering the drawing-room, he saw that in the room beyond it some dance was already over; and presently, seated on a sofa, and distinct in the brilliant candlelight, he saw two figures laughing together like boy and girl, and engaged in a fight, only visible to an interested eye, with the cushions. All the freshness, the irrepressible spirits of youth were in both of them — in the

boy, who was Cyril Watson, in the girl, who was Miss St. Germans. Each seemed to Lacy to be talking some language to the other which he had once known himself but had by this time utterly forgotten. In the girl's face was an animation he had never seen before in it. In that of the young man there was something deeper. Of this, as Lacy observed, she was to all appearance unconscious; but he saw she was conscious of one thing — and this was of complete enjoyment. He sank into a chair between Mrs. Tilney and Lady Madeleine; and affected presently to have forgotten the dancers altogether.

"I have been trying to persuade Lady Madeleine," Mrs. Tilney said to him, who had partially recovered her animation, "to come over with us one day to Monte Carlo, and you and the rest of your party we want to come also. The Tregothrans, who are going to Nice, will give us dinner on our way back; and Lord Crowborough, if the night is fine, will bring us all home in his yacht."

"I have a friend here," said Lacy, looking towards Lady Madeleine, "by whom I will be guided in everything. If she and my other guests like to go, I shall like to do so too." There was a vague pain in his heart, which he made no attempt to analyse; but he felt that, whatever it was, he might be sure of Lady Madeleine's sympathy. Whatever other women might be to him, she at all events was his friend.

CHAPTER XXVI

WHATEVER effect the dissipations of the Villa Martin might have had on Miss St. Germans' mind, they so far affected her body that she found herself unable to appear next morning at breakfast; and half-an-hour later Lacy and Lady Madeleine, who were standing on one of the balconies, saw her with her sketching things, as if eager to avoid observation, stealing away to some hidden spot in the garden.

Lacy turned to his companion, and in a voice between jest and sadness, "I am going," he said, "to prefer a complaint against you. When we walked home from church together, you gave me some bad advice. You tried to encourage me — and, I will confess to you, you did encourage me — to think about a something as possible, which otherwise I should have thought absurd. It *is* absurd. I discovered that it is so last night."

"What!" replied Lady Madeleine, "are you talking about Estelle? Whatever I may have said to you was very good sense indeed. You don't," she suddenly added, "you don't mean to tell me — and yet I believe you do — that you're jealous of young Cyril Watson?"

Lacy laughed. "I ought," he said, "to be flattered by the question which you at once, by instinct, put to me, for it proves how completely right I am. You saw how eagerly she joined with him in the happiness of all those children. You must have noticed it, or you wouldn't have asked me that. But you're wrong if you think I am jealous of Cyril Watson. I certainly did begin with being jealous of something, but that something was not he. It was those thoughts of my own which I knew she could never share with me. That jealousy I had partially got over. But seeing her last night has made me

jealous of another thing. It is those thoughts, those spirits, those happinesses, which I never can share with *her*. I could as soon have joined with her in her last night's pleasures as I could turn head over heels in the gutter, like a street Arab."

"Believe me," said Lady Madeleine, "you make too much out of little. Let me give you my advice once more. Go to her now in the garden; pretend to look at her drawing; talk to her for ten minutes — or five will be quite enough; and then come to me — you will find me on the long terrace — and tell me that all your fancies have been puffed away like cobwebs."

"Well," replied Lacy, "you shall once more be my counsellor. I will go and look at her drawing as soon as the post has come. If there are any letters for you, I will bring them together with my news."

He was as good as his word. As soon as he received his letters, one of which he opened at once and read with an amused laugh, he went into the garden to look for the young artist. He found her at last in a corner, which was sheltered by a hedge of myrtles and commanded a view of the sea and some distant violet mountains. She had her sketching-block on her knee, she poised a pencil in her hand; but instead of sketching she was looking out straight before her. At the sound of Lacy's footsteps she started, and looked up. Her eyes had a welcome in them; and yet instantly she cast them down again. "Don't look," she said. "I've been longing to try this view; but you mustn't look at it, please, till I've got on a little further with it." She had certainly, Lacy saw, not got on far as yet. There was on her paper, excepting a few faint lines, only a blister or two, which shone in the morning sunlight. "Come back," she continued, "a little later, and see what I have done — will you? I like — oh, I like painting better than balls and parties." She looked up quickly again, as if to give him his dismissal for the present. Her eyes had a trace of tears in them, and a flush of trouble was on her cheeks.

Lacy affected to have noticed nothing unusual, and saying in a cheerful voice that he would come back later, made his way to his own terrace on the cliff-side. The figure of a woman

was there, moving slowly away from him, who seemed less fit to be the confidante of a lover's passion than the recipient of it. With all the grace of outline which artifice aims at producing, and with all the grace of movement which artifice generally destroys, Lady Madeleine's appearance was one which might easily have been too noticeable, if it had not been for her own complete unconsciousness of it, and for the pensive, refined, and often abstracted air which surrounded her with an invisible barrier against all male presumption. There was some truth, indeed, in what a candid cousin had said of her, "that she had the aspect of a coquette without the air of one."

"You have not been long," she said to her friend, as he overtook her.

"No," he replied. "The young lady was much preoccupied. She had drawn three lines, and had dropped three tears on her sketching-block; and she told me she liked drawing much better than dancing. She also told me to go away, and to call again later. She is quite different this morning from what I have ever known her before; and I think I understand her better than she understands herself."

"I'm perfectly sure," said Lady Madeleine, "that this child is fond of you."

"That may be," replied Lacy. "But that is not my point. She is fond of something — I don't say somebody — else. And this is a something which some day somebody else will embody for her, and which I never shall. By the way," he went on, as if anxious to change the subject, "there were no letters for you; but I've got one I want to show you, and while you are reading it, I will read another."

They seated themselves on a sunny bench. The letter which he gave to Lady Madeleine was the one at which he had lately laughed.

"Dear Mr. Lacy," it ran, "A number of our fellow-workers, on their way back to England, have halted for a night in our neighbourhood for the express purpose of being present at one of those meetings or services of which I spoke to you. There

has been a difficulty in fixing the date, or I would have given you longer notice; but we have suddenly been obliged to arrange that it shall take place this evening. If you or any of your friends who take an interest — if only a critical interest — in our cause, care to be present, I write to say that we shall be very glad to receive you. I have not written to Lord Runcorn, knowing that he is something of an invalid; but it might interest him, as a statesman, to have some direct insight into what is, beyond all comparison, the most important movement of to-day. If he would come, we should, of course, cordially welcome him.

"Our service, if I may so call it, begins at eight o'clock.

"One word more. I have consented, for the sake of our weaker brethren, to sanction and be present at the recitation of some theistic — indeed, Christian — prayers, thus bowing myself in the House of Rimmon. The old words, however, may be accepted as symbols of a newer and larger meaning; and you will not think the worse of those who know no religion other than self-devotion to the great Social Whole, if they kneel when these prayers are being repeated, and listen to them without overt protest. If you can, will you arrive five minutes before the time, and ask for *me?* I will arrange suitable seats for you. The bearer, should this find you at home, will wait to bring back an answer. — I am, truly yours,

"Selina Norham."

"I see," said Lady Madeleine, "that this has come by hand. Have you sent your answer yet?"

Her companion, however, did not speak. He seemed not to have heard her. She turned to look at him, and saw him, with his face like a statue, staring at a letter in his hand, though he hardly seemed to be reading it. Presently, as if waking from a dream, he gave a little dry laugh, and said, with an odd placidity, "If Mrs. Norham's letter amuses you, I have something else to show you which will amuse you perhaps still more. Will you read that?" he continued, and he placed his letter in her hand.

This document, which was written on blue official paper,

bore a printed address, "Bankside, South Road, Ealing." Its contents were as follows:—

"Dear Sir,—We take the earliest opportunity of bringing to your notice a fact which nearly concerns yourself. You have succeeded to certain properties under the will of the late Octavius Brandon, Esq., in consequence of the death, reported from America, of that gentleman's sole legitimate son. Evidence, however, has been recently placed in our hands which goes to show that the person whose death was reported was not Mr. Octavius Brandon, Junior, but his half-brother, known by the name of George Brandon Parker, with whom he is known to have been living on terms of intimacy. Certain painful circumstances, into which we need not at this stage enter, rendered it advisable that Mr. Brandon should for a time disappear from observation; and the evidence placed in our hands is such as to show conclusively that he availed himself of the demise of Mr. Parker, to whom he bore a strong resemblance, to assume the character of that gentleman, and to represent himself as being the party deceased. The matter has been placed in our hands; and as our client, Mr. O. Brandon —at present going under the name of George Brandon Parker —intends to prosecute his claim to the property to which he is legally entitled, we have been instructed to consult you with a view to ascertaining what is likely to be your own attitude; and whether you would be disposed to push the matter to litigation, or on inspection of the conclusive evidence in our possession, you would prefer that it should be settled privately. —Awaiting your early reply, we beg to remain, dear sir, your obedient servants,

"James, Hawkins, & James, Solicitors."

When Lady Madeleine had finished her reading there followed a short silence. Then she said falteringly, "Do you believe there's a word of truth in it?"

Lacy by this time had recovered his usual manner. "There may be," he said, as though he were speaking of something wholly indifferent to him. "It's at all events true thus far—

that these two half-brothers, as I know, had a striking family likeness to each other. Anyhow, until I hear something more, even you would hardly advise me to be snatching at a bride to my uncertainties. Well — who said on his death-bed, 'Come and see how a Christian can die'? I may soon be asking you to see how a philosopher can lose a fortune. But all this while — as I think you reminded me, only I didn't answer you — Mrs. Norham's Mercury is waiting. I had rather, for several reasons, not be at home this evening. We'll get Miss Tilney to come and amuse Miss St. Germans; and you — will you keep me in countenance and come to Mrs. Norham's vespers?"

Lady Madeleine assented; and as she did so, put her hand on Lacy's. "I am very sorry," she said, "believe me — that you should have all this anxiety." Her hand lay on his with the peculiar touch of a woman who has known what it is to share secret trouble with a man; and her dark eyes, as they looked at him from the ivory paleness of her face — her dark eyes, undershadowed by streaks of transparent purple, looked at him like a night of stars seen through a rainy window-pane.

Any stranger who, watching the demeanour of these two friends that day, had been told that one of them was threatened with some grave misfortune, would have judged that the person threatened was Lady Madeleine, not Lacy. In the afternoon there were callers; but, so far as she could, she avoided them, escaping, at the first opportunity, to the solitude of her own room. Here, before dressing for dinner, she went to a locked despatch-box. She opened it, and from one corner took a tied-up packet of letters. The knot of the ribbon which tied them came undone in her hands. She glanced at them with a kind of sad indifference. Some dried flowers were seen lying between the pages, and a faint scent breathed from them. She took one of the letters at haphazard, like a card from a pack, and looked down at it with the kind of experimental flinching with which a child puts its foot into water too hot or too cold for it. Without unfolding the page, she read what came uppermost, and what came uppermost chanced to be the

following fragment: "But you who are English can but half understand what you are to a man who is more than half a Slav. You can never understand that, in my mind, by the right of my own memories of you, you are mine — you are mine by the flower of your mouth, with all its crimson petals, in which my lips have been buried, and which my lips first unfolded. You are mine by the night when the lamps were shining through the wet orange trees — when my arm was round you — when your face was lifted — when I kissed away the rain-drops from your cheeks." As she read, her expression of sadness became mixed with an expression of contempt. From a box by the fireplace she extracted a few fir-cones. She set them blazing with a match, and on the top of them she placed the letters.

CHAPTER XXVII

Whilst the Château des Fleurs was the scene of these poor private vicissitudes, events on a much grander scale had been taking place at St. Antoine.

Mrs. Norham, stimulated by the thoughts of the increased audience she was to address, and by an arrangement made that her words should be reported in the English papers, felt herself raised to heights of social enthusiasm which would render her more than ever the envy of her beloved equals. But, as has been hinted already, the fire of her lofty zeal was not fanned only by the thought of communicating her selfless spirit to the band of itinerant altruists — her fellow-workers — whom she respected. It was raised to an even whiter heat by the prospect of recommending altruism, through her own inimitable embodiment of it, to the fashionable classes whom she despised. At first, however, in composing the impromptu address, which was to form, as it usually did, the principal feature of the service, she had been embarrassed, in arranging some of the finest of her intended flights, by a fear that they might wound the deplorable and diseased prejudices of those strangers to the fold whose salvation depended on their not being shocked by her — strangers who were evidently not beyond salvation's reach, since they had had grace enough to invite her to their houses, and would shortly again do so. The difficulty, however, which was thus presented to her mind, was removed in a manner entirely unexpected by herself. The strangers, as represented by Lord Runcorn and Lady Cornelia, showed themselves, as the days went on, to be much less sensitive than she imagined. They failed altogether to seek for a renewal of the privilege of her company. Indeed, had such a contingency been possible, it might have almost seemed

that they had forgotten her. Accordingly, as she reflected on these damaging traits in their character, she began to regard her former scruples as superfluous, and to see that persons so callous and insensible to others' greatness required to have their feelings pricked, or even wounded, rather than spared. This important conclusion was still in process of forming itself, when suddenly, in two short minutes, it was turned into a burning certainty. What produced this result was a paragraph in a London paper, which informed Mrs. Norham, for the first time, that a brilliant dinner and dance had taken place at the Villa Martin, giving the brilliant names of the guests, amongst whom she was not one. This incident, she felt, would have the same effect on her eloquence that the burning coal had on the prophet Isaiah. The whole of average humanity — the humble multitudes she loved — had, she felt, been insulted by this insult put on herself, who represented these poor equals of hers, by being so far above them. Let her only entice to her service some of the "fops and fribbles" — the words brought solace to Mrs. Norham's heart — who formed the society thought brilliant at the Villa Martin, and she would soon redeem them by reducing them to a sense of their insignificance.

But it was not Mrs. Norham only who, by a power even greater than herself, was being thus hallowed anew for the forthcoming holy function. The spirit of Mr. Bousefield, who, as usual, was to be the other performer, was also, unsuspected by himself, undergoing an analogous preparation, and the instrument employed for this purpose was none other than his wife. Ever since the reconciliation which had taken place between Mr. Bousefield and Mrs. Norham, after the rupture on which Mrs. Bousefield had founded so many vain hopes, the reconciled parties had been more united than ever; for, in addition to their prospects of redeeming the world generally, another and nearer vision was hovering now before them — the resources which would accrue to them as shareholders in the Tibbits' Motor — resources which would enable Mr. Bousefield to be the patron of countless movements, and which, by endowing Mrs. Norham with a victoria and other

gentilities, would enable her, on behalf of the many, to fight wealth with its own weapons. In proportion, however, as this spiritual partnership became sweeter and more perfect, the distress of Mrs. Bousefield increased — a distress which, though she tried to hide it, Mrs. Norham's sharp eyes recognised, and which, fortified by her snow-pure conscience, she resented as an indecent insult — an aggravated protest of outworn selfism. What could a woman of that kind possibly have to complain of? Mrs. Norham was as incapable of being partner to any marital "infidelity" as she was of dancing a *can-can* or jumping over the moon; whilst as for Mr. Bousefield, every night of his life since his marriage, he and Mrs. Bousefield, in respectable juxtaposition, had snored over the same counterpane, under two adjacent watch-pockets. They did so still; but from that day of the reconciliation onwards Mr. Bousefield's slumbers had been not infrequently disturbed by a restlessness on the part of his wife which, as he said to himself, tried him sorely; and he sometimes also had detected a slight sniffling sound, which he would, as became a Christian, bear as long as he could; but at last, when his fallen nature had got the better of grace, he would say, "My dear, if you've a cold, do blow your nose, and have done with it." "I'll try," the poor lady would answer, heroically forcing herself to be silent. "I'll have plenty of time to-morrow, or for matter of that, any day." At this response Mr. Bousefield would laugh sleepily. "My dear," he would murmur, "you haven't an idea what you're talking about;" and he would close his eyes again in the peace of the consciously immaculate.

Mrs. Bousefield's education having been rigidly puritanical, she ought to have known that there is no kind of marital infidelity, really worthy of the name, other than that of which she did not suspect her husband; and that she had no right to remember anything against him, so long as he did not do her the wrong which a man most easily forgets. Indeed, theoretically, this was doubtless her own conviction still; but her inability to formulate any ground for her grief or grievance, instead of soothing it, only added to its acerbity; and during the night preceding the service it reached its culminating point, driv-

ing her to extremities of which she never had imagined herself capable. Mr. Bousefield, after a well-spent day of spiritual and financial exercise, felt that he required, and indeed deserved, even sounder repose than usual. His wife was possibly not less tired than he; but never had she found unbroken repose more hopeless. Her turnings to and fro woke her husband several times; and each time he was irritated by the same sound of sniffling. He expostulated as usual — first with an easy patience. The second time he was more severe. The third time he was really angry. "My dear," he exclaimed, "do be quiet!" Instead of being quiet, Mrs. Bousefield ceased sniffling and began to sob. "This is indeed too bad," said her husband. "How on earth am I to get my needed rest, if you can't lie still like a quiet, Christian woman, but must wake me up with this childishness the moment I close my eyes. What is it all about? It passes my comprehension to conjecture." Then at last Mrs. Bousefield's feelings ran away with her. "I wish," she exclaimed between her tears, "you'd Mrs. Norham lying where I am. She's not a Christian woman; but she wouldn't disturb you as your wife does."

Had the archangel Michael blown his trumpet into Mr. Bousefield's ear, he could not have experienced greater surprise and horror than he did on hearing these shameless — these unrepeatable words. Had some evil spirit, while he slept, taken his own good wife away, and put Aholah or Aholibah, or perhaps both of them, in her place? His cheeks flamed in the darkness; or at all events he felt as if they did so. "My dear," he exclaimed, in a voice not his own, "I ask you, in the name of God, have you any idea of what you are saying? Is it my own wife whom I hear bringing out of her mouth moral garbage — moral abomination, such as that? Is it my own modest, faithful, decent, Christian wife?"

"Thank you, Mr. Bousefield," she whimpered; "thank you at least for calling me that. I hardly knew what I said. I must just ask you to forgive me."

"With God's help," said Mr. Bousefield, "I will do my best to forget."

So tremendous a scene, however, was not to be forgotten easily. It had two results on the following eventful day. One of these was that, at Mr. Bousefield's request, Mrs. Norham sought out his wife the first thing after breakfast, and begged her, in her most conciliating tones, to choose the psalm or hymn which she liked best, for the theistic part of their service. "I think," said Mrs. Norham, "you've a partiality for the Scottish version of the Psalms. Mr. Bousefield," she added, "was particularly anxious about this." Such was one result of Mr. Bousefield's memories of the night. The other — for they still caused him agitation of an acute kind — appeared later on, during the progress of the sacred service itself.

Mrs. Norham, meanwhile, who had had a letter from Lacy to say that he and another friend at all events would attend, though she was dissatisfied with so scanty a response, yet hoped that it meant more than it seemed to mean; and had utilised the gratitude which she had earned, in connection with the psalm, from Mrs. Bousefield, to persuade her to provide for Lacy, and the contingent that might possibly be brought by him, some slight refreshment, to follow the evening's service, of a more *recherché* character than that which was sufficient for the elect.

The solemn hour drew on. The evening train from St. Estéphe was safely delivered at St. Antoine of the doctor, the barrister, and the personally conducted altruists, who were met by some of the paying guests, and conducted by them to the sacred colony. The ladies were most of them distinguished by wearing their hair short, the gentlemen by wearing it long, and the faces of all of them had the peculiar and fixed expression of earnest persons at a meeting convoked to denounce something. The repast partaken of by this flock was somewhat of the nature of a passover. It was eaten in haste, in order that the two rooms, thrown together to accommodate so large a party, might be rearranged for the purposes of social worship. The business of preparation was performed by Mr. Bousefield and Mrs. Norham, whilst the congregation solaced themselves by sucking oranges outside in the moonlight. The table was pushed aside; chairs were arranged in rows; and at

one end of the room, where a sideboard with a few syphons on it bore a certain resemblance to an altar, a space was left with a sofa on one side of it, an American organ, which had been dragged out of a corner, on the other, and two chairs in the middle, facing those placed for the congregation.

These arrangements were hardly completed when the front-door bell rattled. Then Mrs. Norham for the first time informed Mr. Bousefield that Mr. Lacy, with perhaps a friend or two, had begged permission to be present. "That must be them," she continued, forgetting her grammar. "I must go and see who he's brought. That sofa will do for them, and a few chairs in the front, as they won't like to be conspicuous. Ring the dinner-bell in the garden, and get the others in. Then, when they're settled, come round and join me in the *salon*." Mr. Bousefield nodded, though he looked a little discomposed, and Mrs. Norham disappeared through a door that was near the sideboard.

Ten minutes later the place of worship was full, except the space at the end of it — a space brightly lighted, all the rest of the room being left in comparative darkness. And now at last the door near the sideboard opened again, and Mrs. Norham re-entered, with a beautiful lady following her, tall, dark-eyed, graceful, and exhaling from every detail of her toilette the precise charm which the reformers were to banish from an improved world. The eyes of all the earnest females fixed themselves on this apparition with the eager and observant animosity which is half-sister to admiration; whilst behind Lady Madeleine some of the luminaries of Startfield Hall recognised the insolent stranger who had proposed to pervert the Institution from a school of noble discontent into a school of domestic economy. Mrs. Norham, who had been indulging in visions of Lord Runcorn and Lady Cornelia, and had been disappointed at finding that Lacy had brought Lady Madeleine only, was comforted by observing that the presence of even these two strangers had produced amongst her flock a general and profound sensation; and she was determined that it should not be lessened by any want of her own efforts to heighten it. Turning therefore to Mr. Bousefield, who had

deposited himself on one of the central chairs, she breathed a word in his ear, she herself still standing. Then facing the congregation, in crisp and business-like accents, accompanied by an engaging smile, she said, "It has been our custom hitherto to confine these meetings to those who are completely acquainted, and are in active sympathy, with our principles. But I am sure we shall all of us welcome the presence of any persons who, belonging by training and tradition to the ranks of those opposed to us, have yet been sufficiently touched by an interest in the social movement, to desire to see in action the real motive forces of the world. Accordingly to-night we are happy to have amongst us a lady who has been educated amongst the old ideas of privilege, and a gentleman whose presence is not rendered less significant by the fact that for years he was a Tory Member of Parliament, and is nearly related to the present Tory Premier. Mr. Bousefield will now, as usual, proceed with that portion of our service, to the literal sense of which we do not all of us subscribe, but the inner spirit of which is our common bond of union. He will begin," said Mrs. Norham, "with giving out a psalm or hymn — I am not responsible for its selection — of which type-written copies — I hope as many as will be wanted — have been placed on some of the seats, so that those who are disposed to do so may take part in the singing of it."

Mrs. Norham sat down and Mr. Bousefield got up. His spectacles were on his nose, and he was scrutinising a piece of paper. He had not been aware till that moment what sacred song had been chosen; and as he now gave it out, conscious that the choice of it was his wife's, the exceedingly painful feelings which had been excited in him during the previous night became more displeasing and more acute than ever. He went, however, through his work bravely. "We will commence our proceedings," he said, "with singing the fifth, sixth, and seventh verses of the Scottish metrical version of the ninety-second psalm, and the eighty-third verse of the hundred-and-nineteenth psalm — Tune, 'Edinburgh.'"

Then his wife, who meanwhile had seated herself at the American organ, with tremulous but devout fingers drew forth

sounds from its entrails which at once filled the room with the atmosphere of a northern kirk; and presently some dozen voices were giving forth the following words, which the organist had selfishly chosen with reference rather to herself than to the congregation: —

"By reason of my groaning voice
My bones cleave to my skin.
Like pelican in wilderness
Forsaken I have been."

Even Mr. Bousefield himself, hurt and indignant as he was, had so strong a taste for psalmody that he could not refrain from joining, and revenged himself on the words by shouting them more loudly than anybody. Indeed, no precentor in Scotland could have rendered with more sonorous unction the concluding verses, which were these: —

"I like unto a bottle am
That in the smoke is set:
I'm black, and parched with thirst: yet I
Thy statutes don't forget."

His wife for a moment looked round at him with tears of gratification in her eyes. Her look, however, quite escaped him; but when the singing came to an end, she received a touch of comfort, this time from Mr. Tibbits, who muttered what was in reality his favourite word "Gammon," but what Mrs. Bousefield and others imagined to be "Amen." This was repeated by almost the whole of the congregation, with some of whom it was — as it seems to be with many people — a decent synonym for "I am glad that that is over."

Then Mr. Bousefield, solemnly retreating to the sideboard, sank on his knees, and, in his refined and well-modulated voice, began one of those extempore prayers which tend to address themselves to the congregation quite as often as to the Deity, and when addressed to the latter, seem designed by their authors to convey information rather than to proffer requests. He started with informing Omniscience that though many of those present considered themselves not to be Chris-

tians, and indeed not even Theists, they were Theists and Christians in reality, and only failed to perceive the fact, owing to some deficiency for which their brethren forbore to blame them; and for which Mr. Bousefield was confident that Omniscience would make due allowance. Having thus gathered all his friends into one spiritual fold, he continued his course of information by explaining that their common desire was to realise socially the true Christian life; and this was to be done by diffusing amongst all their brethren an equality of those highest blessings — that precious moral culture — those noble self-respects — which would rebuke the unchasteness, and mortify the pride, of the aristocracy, without diminishing the mercies and responsibilities, by which Mr. Bousefield meant the incomes, vouchsafed to and enjoyed by the virtuous middle-class. "Wherefore," Mr. Bousefield continued, "in order that this end may be achieved, do Thou, who art teaching us to read Thy Gospels in the fuller light now thrown on them by the doctrines of social evolution, endow us Thy servants with all necessary gifts. Temper the zeal," he went on, remembering the ferocity of Mr. Tibbits, who demanded that everything should be nationalised, with the exception of the Tibbits' Motor, "temper the zeal of certain of us, which is not according to knowledge. Illuminate their darkness with some slight glimmering of sense. Vouchsafe," he proceeded, recollecting how two of his lady boarders, who proposed to reform the entire legal system of England, had presumed to contradict him when he corrected their misconceptions as to Judge and Jury, "vouchsafe a suitable sense of their own ignorance to any of us who may be debarred from learning by a false belief that they understand subjects already which they have never studied. Confirm to us the blessings of lofty and sustaining friendships; and even as the man in many fields labours for the woman, so may the companionship of lofty and inspired women be as a lantern to the man's feet." Mr. Bousefield, whose eyes here strayed in the direction of Mrs. Norham, found that he had accidentally struck on a new method of devotion — a method which combined the advantages of reproof, satire, and the poetry of Platonic affection,

and from which he derived so much unexpected comfort, that he was suddenly led by all the stored-up feelings of the day to pursue it in one petition more. "We beseech Thee further," he said, "to quench all unreasonable, unworthy, irritating, and degrading jealousies which may be entertained by some of Thine handmaids of the pure influences of others, and which interfere more than anything else" — his eyes here rested on the tortoise-shell comb of his wife — "with the peace of the domestic, and the nobility of the intellectual life."

Mr. Bousefield was so completely carried away by his own fervour, that he buried his face in his hands, nearly knocking over one of the syphons, and abruptly became silent. Had he been listening, he would have heard a sound, which he might, for a moment, have regarded as a remarkable answer to prayer. This was a faint sob, proceeding from Mrs. Bousefield, who, kneeling by the American organ, had not missed one of his words; but what immediately followed would have made him reconsider his opinion. Hastily pressing the back of her hand against her eyes, Mrs. Bousefield rose in agitation; and hardly aware of what she did, took refuge in the instrument before her, struck a few chords at random, and finally drifted into the Old Hundredth Psalm. Her husband and Mrs. Norham both stared at her with horror. It was too late, however, to mend matters. At the first musical sound the entire congregation had risen. It was hopeless to bring them to their knees again; and thus the essentially Christian portion of the social service ended. Mr. Bousefield saved the situation by his own inability to cope with it. He remained kneeling for a few moments longer, for the simple reason that he was doubtful how to get up with dignity. Mrs. Norham perceived this; and her quick artistic eye recognising that his devotional attitude was a suitable *finale* in itself, she gave to his ministrations an impressiveness which intrinsically, she thought, was wanting to them, by beginning, whilst he still was on his knees, her own part of the proceedings.

She rose, and faced the congregation; but before she could open her lips, she was welcomed and kept silent for a moment or two by a sound of reverential clapping. She waved her

hand, as though to deprecate this ovation, and scanned the faces before her apparently in search of somebody. Mr. Bousefield meanwhile having seated himself rather shamefacedly at her side, she bent down to him and whispered, "Is Squelch here?" "I believe not," Mr. Bousefield answered; "he's so highly strung just now, he felt he could not stand the excitement:" — the actual fact being that the author of the forthcoming volume, who in so few days' time was to be famous, was carousing in the village with a young lady whom he said he reverenced as a priestess of manhood, and whom several times of late he had, by his modest bounties, roused to outbursts of close, though perhaps spasmodic, affection for him. "Well," Mrs. Norham whispered, "perhaps it is better so." Then straightening herself, quiet being now restored, she clasped her hands before her, holding them so that the two forefingers, pointing downwards, formed the sides of an isosceles triangle; and fixing her favourite rapt look on the cornice, she began.

The early Christians, she said, when they met in their days of struggle, could surely have had no more vitalising, more spiritually nutritive, exercise than the recitation of the creed or symbol which reminded them of what they held in common — the holy secret that was to leaven the entire world. "And we too," she continued, "have our creed or symbol likewise — our secret yet more holy, which will leaven a wider world than the apostle of the Gentiles dreamed of: and for us too, surely, there can on an occasion like this be no more vitalising exercise than to examine this creed together — our secret so profound, and yet, ah, so simple! Nothing shows the fact and the law of progress more plainly than the superiority of this altruistic *Credo* of ours to even the simplest of the *Credos* of Christianity. The simplest of these — what is it? A series of historical or pseudo-historical assertions embedded in philosophical hypotheses which are stated as ascertained truths, but which, except in so far as they imply a geocentric theory of the universe, have no point of contact with the ascertainable facts of life. But with our *Credo* — nay, should we not rather call it our *Scio* — for it is not an *I believe* any longer,

but an *I know* — the case is very different. Our creed concerns itself not with remote occurrences, not with theories of things which are forever beyond our ken. It concerns itself solely with the living heart of man: and the first article of this creed, which by implication contains the whole of it, that happiness — the pearl of price, to which all human circumstance is the setting, is to be found in working for the enjoyment, the convenience, the social well-to-doness, not of ourselves, but of others.

"Oh, the newness, the shining newness, of this great truth! The world never heard anything even remotely resembling it before. But it is not new," Mrs. Norham continued — and Lacy perceived that with a wise economy she was repeating some sacred words which she had once uttered to himself; "it is not new in one sense, any more than the law of gravitation was new when Sir Isaac Newton discovered it. Rather, it is as old as the human race is. But old truths become dynamically new ones, by our arriving at a conscious recognition of them: and we of the new faith find actually lying in our hands the treasure which, for all these centuries, we have been vainly looking for in the clouds.

"Sublime mystery! Holy and saving paradox! We — for we, delivered from the mists of selfism, are individually no less humble than the humblest Christian hermit — we see that all the enjoyments, luxuries, pleasures, of this life, mental and physical, are nothing as viewed in connection with, and enjoyed by, ourselves: but what we should despise ourselves for enjoying delights us — gives us the true saint's rapture — when we witness it being enjoyed by our brother. If I give to myself a glass of the rarest wine, the satisfaction which it gives to me is contemptible. If, instead of drinking it myself, I pour it down my brother's throat, his sensations are for me a sacrament. A pleasure which for me is as valueless as a forged bank-note, becomes a genuine one when I palm it off on my friend; and the larger the number of these to you worthless notes you can palm off on your neighbour, the more incalculable will become your true riches and theirs.

"And now let me impress yet another thought on you, to

your exceeding comfort. The happiness you derive from this altruistic process of passing on your own waste paper to others, being multiplied by the number of those which it directly or indirectly reaches, learn to realise that each smallest action of your own has its influence on all men who are now living, or who shall live in the remotest ages. Accordingly, if you do a kindness to, and deny yourself for the sake of, some relative or acquaintance whom you know, and if you feel, as you may feel, that your reward is of a moderate character, think that you are really doing it to millions whom you have never seen or heard of; and what an intoxicating rapture will visit your hearts then!

"Against this divine paradox logic fights in vain; for it is founded on and is ever reattested by something greater than logic — namely experience; and we can no more get rid of this fact by proving that it cannot be true, than we can," said Mrs. Norham, again repeating a previous observation, "rid ourselves by the same process of our belief in the external world.

"So much, then," she continued, slightly changing her tone, "for generalities. I have just spoken of experience. Let us consult our own experiences. This creed of ours, as I of course need not remind you, is valuable only because it is directly translatable into action, and into the feelings from which action springs: and I will ask you to consider two things — our own common work-a-day feelings as altruists, and our actions as a practical Church.

"Let us take then those so-called good things which so many at present covet for themselves, or bow down to, in servile worship, when they are possessed by others. Let us take inordinate riches, the empty snobbery of rank, or so-called pedigree, hereditary privilege, or the trappings and dissipations of fashion. For us — for you — for me — for all of us — these things would be nothingness, if it were not for the contemptuous amusement they excite in us, when we regard them in connection with ourselves, and for our determination to put an end to them, on account of the mischief they do to others. No feelings are more vivid, more vital in the hearts of all of us, than these."

Mr. Bousefield here looked up at Mrs. Norham with eyes of admiring amazement, and then looked down at his knees, and beat time on them to her periods with his hands. But Mr. Bousefield's silent tribute was not her sole applause. As soon as the congregation realised that the liveliness of their faith in altruism was shown by their antipathy to all social advantages to which they themselves could never hope to attain, the very floor of the room cried out in Mrs. Norham's honour, responsive to the feet of her solemn and stirred disciples.

And now, rising from strength to strength, she went on to her second point. She passed from feelings to action. She described the course of action by which these loving feelings could be satisfied — namely, by the diffusion amongst all of equal tastes, equal aptitude, equal culture. Nor must the more ardent spirits amongst her hearers, Mrs. Norham said, think that this educational work had no direct social results. "You may know," she said, "how practical is our work by one sign more than any other — namely, the irritation which every effort on our part to equalise human culture excites in those classes, or that World, with which we, the new Church, are at war. Whatever is irritating to them, is gain unspeakable to us. Let us give to the humblest labourer the education of the most fastidious lord: and the lord will no longer be able to despise the labourer; whilst the labourer will be freed from the yoke of degrading labour, for it will be intolerable to him. And then, in spite of those incidental superiorities of fortune with which the spirit of individual enterprise will always be rewarded, we shall all be able to look one another fairly and equally in the face. Nor must you think that the spread of education is confined to the traditional methods of teaching. It is spread by the public meeting as much as by the class or the lecture. Every earnest meeting convoked to protest against almost anything — whether it be titular distinctions, or vaccination, or the right of employers to combine, or ostentatious fancy-balls, or the laws which would deprive vice of its consequences — "

"Hear, HEAR!" exclaimed Mr. Bousefield, in a voice of such enthusiasm that the conclusion of Mrs. Norham's sentence

was lost in the solemn echoes which responded to his: and when she was next audible, it was evident that she was appending her peroration.

"Our efforts," she was saying, "have already borne fruit. Already we have shown the efficacy of our equality of culture, by our having elicited from our infant Church a signal equality of achievement. Already one of our members, who owes nothing to privilege, has shown himself one of the most marvellous inventors of this or of any age: but he is present, and his modesty forbids me to speak of him in such terms as he deserves. Another, whom we took from the humblest and most galling of occupations, has shown himself to his friends, and will shortly be showing himself to the world, as one of our greatest poets. He is not with us at this moment, although he is not far off. His sensitive body, easily tired and shaken by the exercise of his master faculty, is unequal to the agitation incident to a meeting such as this of ours. Of him, therefore, I may speak freely. Leonard Squelch, who was till lately a journeyman tailor, will in a day or two give a volume of poems to the public which will make every critic acclaim him as the greatest of our existing singers. Those of you who are returning to London will find this volume published when you arrive. Six copies of it will be presented to Startfield Hall, this forming, with a poor work by myself, the nucleus of our library that is to be.

"Surely the new Church, then, is already justified by her children; and may be content to be known and judged by first fruits such as these. What are the affectations and exclusiveness of empty aristocrats and plutocrats; what are ranks, titles — distinctions which can never be universal, and are valued only because they cannot — what are they, and the artificial world in which they are to be found? Do we covet them? Do we desire that they should be ours? No — a thousand times no. They are merely a tumour on the mystical body of Humanity — a sign and a cause of an anti-social malady — which it is the mission of us, who have been baptized into the Socialistic Church, to cure. The life of Humanity is in the masses of Humanity: and for us, the great

sin against the new and the holier spirit is a yielding to that concupiscence for any exceptional lot by which we, from that life-giving common mass, may be separated."

Here Mrs. Norham ceased, and for a moment or two hid her face in her hands; then suddenly resuming her every-day manner, she said, with a sisterly smile to the audience: "Our meeting to-night is over. Some tea and sandwiches will be brought into this room presently, for those of you who are going back to St. Estéphe by train. The train leaves the station at eleven minutes after ten." Having thus, with an implied benediction, dismissed the body of the faithful, she turned to Lady Madeleine, and said, bending down graciously to her, "Will you and Mr. Lacy come with us into the drawing-room; and let us, whilst your carriage is being ordered, refresh your bodies, since we have so ruthlessly wearied your minds."

Mrs. Norham in one part of her address had been hampered by a delicacy of feeling which was superfluous. The part in question was her reference to Mr. Tibbits; for when she mentioned him, he was in the room no longer. Mr. Tibbits for some years had abstained from the use of alcohol; but the mental strain involved in bringing out his great invention, together with the dazzling prospects which its imminent success opened out to him, had made something stronger than Mrs. Norham's claret, which he called "swipes," as essential to him as it was to the altruistic poet. He had therefore, as early as he could, escaped to the same place of entertainment at which Mr. Squelch and the priestess of manhood were leaving preliminary kisses in their cups together; and finding the two still seated at a marble table, had joined them, undeterred by a certain coldness in their demeanour, which vanished, to say the truth, when he proposed to treat both of them. Mr. Tibbits, however, being no proficient in French, was obliged to direct his conversation to the poet, rather than to the lady; and the kindly beverage brought to him having readily loosened his tongue, he was soon expressing, with a rude but honest eloquence, his thoughts on the subject that lay most near to his heart.

"Can't fail," he said. "Science shows that it can't. This motor of mine, if it's worth a tanner, is worth at the very least two hundred thousand pounds; and my share, which in justice ought to be nine-tenths of it, can't be less than a hundred and twenty thousand. The Tibbits' Motor will defy all competition. Haven't I all along been saying that competition was the cause of poverty? Well — so it is; and in the Motor business Tibbits will put an end to it. I'll show the workingman what is the proper reward of labour. I'll show him, not by talking about it, but by getting it. I'll show him Labour riding in its own carriage, waited on by its own servants, employing its own workmen. Two horses! — not a bit of it. I'll ride in a coach and four. Ay — when Mark Tibbits is riding in his coach and four, the cause of labour against capital will be won, and no mistake about it! And I'll tell you what, my boy, when that day comes, I'll treat you every night to some proper stuff like this."

CHAPTER XXVIII

Lacy, on leaving Lady Madeleine after his morning interview with her on the terrace, had returned to Miss St. Germans, and talked to her for a few minutes. She had made some progress with her sketch, which he examined and criticised carefully. As he was doing this, she looked up at him once; and a girl's first love was floating visibly in her eyes. When he gave the sketch back to her, he laid his hand on her shoulder. He had never before touched her in such a familiar way: but there was something in the action — an austere and regretful something — which made the girl feel that he had put some gulf between them. He did not believe that Miss St. Germans actually, at that present moment, preferred his uncle's young secretary to himself, but that she inevitably would do so should she ever come to know him — him, Tristram Lacy, as at heart he really was. And the reason, so he told himself, was this: The very life of her life — the source of all that was beautiful and attractive in her — was a belief in life's possibilities — in an unknown, beautiful something which lay behind, and which was constantly shining through the material and mental things, which broke it into prismatic colour. This belief, so he told himself, young Watson still possessed; and it was this belief that he himself had lost. "She may think she likes me," he said to himself, "but the *me* she likes is a sham. Come, my young friend Cyril, you shall teach her that it is so."

Occupied by this last thought, and remembering the wish that Miss St. Germans had often expressed to be taken out in the boat, he wrote to Cyril Watson, asking him to call next morning for a row before luncheon, or a sail, as the case might be. The bearer of this note took another to Lady Tregothran,

in which he told her that he felt disposed to act on her late suggestion, and would call on her — suggesting next morning as the time — to discuss with her affairs at Manchester. His next step was to send a telegram to his London lawyers, asking them to find out who were the James, Hawkins, & James, describing themselves as solicitors of Bankside, South Road, Ealing. Cyril Watson's answer was satisfactory; and accordingly, at dinner that night, before setting out for Mrs. Norham's, he asked Miss St. Germans if she would care to go next day on the water. The proposal called back to her face an animation which had since the morning deserted it, and she looked as if her late low spirits were a cloud that had passed away.

When the next day came, however, a certain disappointment was in store for her. Mr. Cyril Watson, who, exhibiting the virtues of punctuality, arrived just in time to meet Miss St. Germans in the hall as she came downstairs arrayed for the expedition, brought with him a note for Lacy from Lady Tregothran, which conveyed a suggestion, as Lacy had meant it should, that he should go down to her and discuss the Manchester election at once.

"Look," he said, as he gave it to Miss St. Germans, "you must forgive me for failing you. I will take you down to the boat-house, and hand you over to the boatman; but then I must leave you in Mr. Watson's care and his."

The boat-house was a shining toy, painted blue and yellow; coils of light from the waves came leaping gaily into its shadow, and all the morning sang in the voice of the lapping water. The girl, the boy, and the boatman were presently shooting from the shore, whilst purple seaweed and coral-coloured sea-anemones shone and wavered in the green transparence under them. Lacy turned when he had climbed again to the garden, and for some minutes looked down at a pair of dipping oars and a bright red parasol spread like a floating poppy. From the oars in their rowlocks a faint sound rose to him. He turned away; and, with blankness rather than pain in his heart, he walked through the woods to St. Hilaire, and found Lady Tregothran at her hotel.

"Well," she said to him, "it is a good sign that you have come to me. I hope you are going to tell me that my sermon has had a good effect on you. Depend upon it, if you don't think very much of life, you won't think any the better of it by keeping out of the game."

"I am," replied Lacy, laughing, "by no means so sure of that. No labour in the world is harder or more degrading than playing a game, if games don't happen to interest you."

"No position in the world," replied Lady Tregothran, "is more intolerable than that of a man who might be distinguished, and who deliberately courts obscurity. I spoke just now of playing the game or keeping out of it; but in reality life is a game at which you must play, whether you want to do so or no. The only question is, will you win at the game or lose? I don't know you very well; but, believe me, I am really your friend when I urge you not to lose this new chance that offers itself of coming back with honour into public life. You won't remain a mere private member long. Your activity, your power of speaking, your social advantages, will tell. You will be admired, you will be feared, you will be hated; or, to put all success into one word, you will be felt. You will tell me that success such as this is a despicable thing when it is won. That may be so. Well — good people are anxious to get to heaven, not because they think it at all an eligible place, but because they think it less ineligible than hell. In the same way, success may be as despicable a thing as you like, but you ought to aim at it because it is incalculably less despicable than failure."

"Well," said Lacy, laughing, "my one object in coming to you was to tell you that your persuasions had made a convert of me already. I have almost decided to do what you suggest I should do. By to-morrow or next day I can give you a positive answer; and as you and Mrs. Tilney seem to know the whole state of affairs better than I do, though I live but twelve miles from the spot, you can give me, perhaps, some idea — "

"Oh," she said, interrupting him, "wait till to-morrow or next day, when you have quite made up your mind. I am delighted to hear what you tell me; and I don't fear a refusal.

To-morrow, by the way, we're all going to Monte Carlo — and as for ourselves, we remain at Nice for a day or two. But our omniscient friend, Mrs. Tilney, has the particulars at her finger-ends. Talk to her when you've quite made up your mind, and see that you flatter me by making it up the right way."

Before Lacy could reply, there came a waiter's rap at the door. Lady Tregothran said "*Entrez*," and closely following on the waiter's heels, as though unembarrassed by any doubt of his welcome, a gentleman made his appearance, dressed quite as carefully as the Poodle, though something like twice his age. His nose was aquiline, his bald forehead was effulgent, his neat little dyed moustache betrayed the delicate application of curling-tongs, and his bearing was so happy a mean between the extremes of cringing and confidence that Aristotle himself would have been puzzled to prove that it was not perfection.

"Ah, *miladi!*" he exclaimed, "I have come to tell you — we have only just now heard it — that our yacht, the *Outlander*, will be in here to-morrow morning, and Mrs. Helbeckstein is very anxious to know if we could be of any service in taking your party over to Monte Carlo. She is not a big boat — just six hundred and fifty, but you would not find her roll. We are going in her ourselves, anyhow."

The truth of the matter was that Mrs. Helbeckstein, the day before, had heard of the projected expedition, and hoping to take part in it, but having failed to secure an invitation, she had telegraphed to Toulon, where their yacht was undergoing some slight repairs, ordering it to be sent to St. Hilaire without an hour's delay. An answer had come from the captain ten minutes ago, and her husband had at once been despatched on his present mission.

"I'm sorry," said Lady Tregothran, with a kind of patronising familiarity, "but all our plans, I'm afraid, are already settled. If we go on a yacht at all, it will be, I believe, on Lord Crowborough's. What! Mr. Lacy, are you going? Well, we shall meet to-morrow."

As Lacy left the room he heard Mr. Helbeckstein informing

Lady Tregothran, in a tone of disappointed satisfaction, that, whatever else might happen, Lady Flotsam was coming on their yacht with them. "Well," Lady Tregothran was answering, "sit down for a minute or two. I hope if she comes you will be very careful of her complexion. She is my dearest friend, and I should be sorry if anything belonging to her should suffer."

Lacy, with all his philosophy, when he got back to the château, was a little disappointed at finding how complete and cloudless a success the boating excursion had proved which he had himself devised. His depression, however, found some sort of corrective in a telegram which reached him that evening in the middle of dinner. It was an answer to that which he had sent the day before to his lawyers. Its contents were these — "No such firm of solicitors either in London or Ealing. Any letter so signed obviously an imposture. Bankside, Ealing, is a private residence, known to us." As Lacy read this a load was lifted from his mind. Lady Madeleine, who was watching him, saw his face brighten; and her own showed signs of a satisfaction not less sincere than his. They were both, therefore, in a better frame of mind than they might have been to enjoy the forthcoming expedition to Monte Carlo. Lacy was now even able to be amused at one of the signs by which Cyril Watson had betrayed the prosperity of his morning — namely, a doubt, which he expressed with much solicitous feeling, whether Monte Carlo were not a place to which no girl should be taken. "Well," Lacy had said to him, "our two young ladies, it happens, will have plenty of chaperons, and if there are not enough for both, I, as her host, will commit Miss St. Germans to your care."

The morning of the expedition came; and whilst the *Outlander*, white as a swan, was floating with its steam up in front of Mrs. Helbeckstein's villa, the party at whose disposal she had been so anxious to place it had assembled at the neighbouring station on the St. Tropez line, from whence they were to start for Monte Carlo in the saloon-carriage of M. Martin. The Tregothrans, Mrs. Tilney and her daughter, Lacy, Cyril Watson, Lady Madeleine, and Miss St. Germans — five ladies

and only three men — the party was composed of these, when it began its pursuit of pleasure; but on reaching Monte Carlo the balance of the sexes would be redressed by the addition of Lord Crowborough, their prospective host, and an intimate friend of his — a Mr. Reuben Quixano, whom he was said to have found by experience to be worth his weight in gold.

Lord Crowborough, whilst his guests were on their way to him, was expecting them with mixed feelings. If an experience of wives tends to make a man a good husband, his well-known experience of the wives of three of his friends would have certainly fitted him, by this time, for the condition of holy matrimony; but whether it fitted for it or no, it had given him no inclination for it. It happened, however, that his succession to an aged uncle's fortune was dependent on his marrying with that uncle's approval; and of the many possible wives that under these circumstances would be suitable, Miss Tilney had caught his attention as being less objectionable than the rest. She was tall, she was handsome, and though she had all the ways of the world with her, she was what he considered as the next best thing to being vicious — she was perfectly innocent, or — as he called it — "perfectly straight." That very morning, to his friend Mr. Quixano, he had said, with covert reference to her, "My dear fellow, the thing's this. A woman you like can't know too much. The woman you marry can't know too little." Mr. Quixano, who had almond-shaped eyes and a fine olive complexion, made a half-articulate sound expressive of meditative dissent; and Lord Crowborough replied with an observation which threw perhaps as much light on his own delicate nature as on that of women in general. "You see," he said, "if she's innocent, you can easily make her t'other thing; but if she's t'other thing, you never can make her innocent."

The two philosophers were engaged in this high discourse whilst waiting till it should be time to meet their friends at the station. Of women whom Lord Crowborough elegantly described as "t'other thing," Mr. Reuben Quixano knew almost as much as his friend. He was, indeed, the companion of his gallantries at the New Rotunda on the night of

the carnival at which Lacy had assisted; and they both had been refreshing themselves with draughts of the same knowledge every evening since their arrival at Monte Carlo. Nevertheless, with an effort, they were both of them fully equal to comporting themselves in a manner consistent with the common traditions of decency; and this effort to-day they were both of them prepared to make — Lord Crowborough because he was serious in his resolution to recommend himself to Miss Tilney, and Mr. Reuben Quixano because he was, if possible, even more serious in his anxiety to recommend himself to polite society, with which his acquaintance hitherto had been of a scanty kind, though he had, in such places as the Park, Henlingham, and the Opera, assiduously exhibited to its notice his coats, his shirt-fronts, and his jewelry. As for Lord Crowborough, indeed, when having met his party at the station he found himself mounting with Mrs. Tilney the path to the Casino Gardens, he felt as proud of being seen with a woman who had preserved her reputation as he ever had been, during the most innocent portion of his life, of being seen with a woman who had lost it. Mrs. Tilney rejoiced like an angel over this repentant sinner — an angel who might possibly rise to the yet higher dignity of a mother-in-law.

Everything proceeded to happen precisely as might have been wished and expected. The two young ladies, who had never seen Monte Carlo before, admired the glittering vision of mountains and white villas. Every one admired the luncheon, which was provided at a celebrated *café*, where even a saint in holy-week could hardly have kept his fast at anything less than twenty-five francs a meal; and every one — a matter more important still — sat in the place which the promoters of the entertainment desired. Lord Crowborough, who was seated between Mrs. and Miss Tilney, talked to the daughter with some real knowledge about music, speaking of the Casino as an establishment desirable only on account of its concerts; and deplored, in the ear of the mother, the general tone of the place, advising her with a most paternal solicitude to take neither of her young ladies into the gaming-rooms. And in these dissuasions he was altogether sincere.

He was afraid that amongst the company which encircled the various tables he would be betrayed to Mrs. Tilney as the possessor of a larger circle of acquaintances than he was, at the moment, at all disposed to own. Cyril Watson, on account of Miss St. Germans, was delighted by these views of Lord Crowborough's, though he was in his heart of hearts a little disappointed that the protection of maidenhood from contamination had not been left wholly to himself; and as he sat by her at the concert, and listened to the finest string-band in Europe, he enjoyed a happiness greater than any which mere music ever conferred on anybody.

The concert being over, a stroll on the Terrace followed. The appearance on the scene of the Tregothrans and Mrs. Tilney was almost at once signalised by an eager competition to address them amongst various members of the social world of London, who soon surrounded them, full of smiles and welcome; whilst Lord Tregothran was buttonholed by some gentlemen whose faces bore the stamp of thought — of thought, that is to say, when it is concentrated on the shooting of pigeons. He had not conversed with them long before he turned to his wife, who had by this time annexed Mr. Reuben Quixano as her squire, and asked her, with careless good-humour, if she would go back to Nice without him, and take charge of their guests and the dinner which had been ordered at London House. "I've just arranged," he said, "with George Elwes to shoot to-morrow; and it suits me better to dine and sleep here to-night. I shall telegraph to Johnson to come on with my things; and you perhaps will turn up and see the match."

"My dear," said Lady Tregothran, coolly, "do just as you like. I daresay I shall not collapse under the responsibility of entertaining a party of eight or nine friends at a restaurant; but no doubt, if I feel myself liking to give way, Mr. Quixano will take your place and support me. Ah, Captain Elwes, how are you? Take care of Tregothran."

"Nita! you naughty, haughty, nasty, disagreeable thing, what do you mean by cutting me? Oh, my dear, what a diviney-winey hat!" The speaker was Lady Flotsam, in the

most dazzling of marine toilettes, who had both Lady Tregothran's hands by this time in hers.

Lady Tregothran's nostril curled a little. "And oh, my dear," she said, "what an infernal-pernal monkey you have got there grinning at me on the handle of that new umbrella of yours."

"Rather sweet, isn't he?" said Lady Flotsam, in a caressing voice. "I've come over in Mr. Helbeckstein's darling yacht; and, you sweet thing, what do you think? Mr. Helbeckstein has played for me, and I've just won a hundred louis."

"I wish," said Lady Tregothran, "Mr. Helbeckstein would do the same for me."

"Ah, *miladi!*" said a voice at Lady Flotsam's back — a voice that was none other than Mr. Helbeckstein's own, "I could ask for nothing better than to be allowed to do so. I always," he continued, pushing himself dexterously forward and fixing on Lady Tregothran an enterprising pair of eyes, with a meaning in them which he kept for such occasions, like a sort of amatory circular — "I always," he continued, slightly dropping his voice, "am in luck at the tables when I play for a pretty lady."

"I'm afraid," said Lady Tregothran, "I can't bring you luck to-day; for we're just going back to Nice on Lord Crowborough's yacht."

"Well, then," said Mr. Helbeckstein, with a courtly shrug of his shoulders, "some oder day — any day." But he was here interrupted by a lady — a lady who was his own wife. Mrs. Helbeckstein's appearance was attributable to no vulgar jealousy. She was as pleased, indeed, with her husband's conquests as if they were her own, and would have been delighted to have seen him a co-respondent in any sufficiently fashionable divorce case. Her motive was merely a desire to be seen amongst Lady Tregothran's party; and as she had just been introduced to a Russian Grand Duke, she felt herself to be shining with a kind of reflected royalty, and capable of pushing her way into the private apartments of an Emperor. She was, moreover, armed with a definite excuse for her invasion. She was the bearer of a piece of news for Lady

Tregothran and Mrs. Tilney, which secured her, as she knew it would do, the civil attention of everybody. It appeared that Lady Dovedale, who had come with them to Nice on their yacht, had been taken ill on the voyage. She had to be left on board; and was, Mrs. Helbeckstein was very sorry to say, at this moment spitting blood in her cabin. "I have just," she said, "seen Lady Madeleine Seaton; and with very nice feelings she has gone off to her mother — not that dere is anything in the very least to be alarmed at — and Mr. Lacy has gone to de train with her. They asked me to say that they would join you at London House. I wish I could have tempted you all to dine with us instead on the *Outlander*."

This temptation, however, Lady Tregothran and Mrs. Tilney resisted. Lord Crowborough meanwhile had been pacing the terrace with Miss Tilney; and Cyril Watson, leaning on the white balustrade, had been quoting Shelley to Miss St. Germans, and carrying back her mind to the days when a temple of Isis stood on one of the heights behind them, or when, earlier still, the prows of Phœnician galleys glittered in the harbour below them — the harbour where now Lord Crowborough's glittering yacht awaited them, floating on the sewage of modern Monaco.

Both the young ladies had been sufficiently pleased with their experiences; for Lord Crowborough was carried away by the novelty of talking to a woman in a way that was calculated neither to disgust nor corrupt her; and the extreme difficulty of the process only piqued him into continuing it; whilst as for Miss St. Germans, though Lacy had said but little to her, what he had said had been so kind that she felt herself happy and contented in listening to his substitute, who was nearer her own age, and who seemed to her in some ways to stand more on her own level.

Nor, when the party repaired to Lord Crowborough's yacht, which, though not so large as the *Outlander*, was of very creditable size, was the satisfaction of Mrs. Tilney inferior to that of any of her companions. The vessel strengthened her in the opinion that Lord Crowborough's affairs were, like his moral character, better than people thought them. We are

often as ignorant of the means by which our impressions of our friends are formed, as we are of the means by which our dinners are cooked; and Mrs. Tilney would have been surprised to learn that her present impression of Lord Crowborough was largely due to the astute and delicate tact of Mr. Reuben Quixano — a gentleman whom she had never seen before. The yacht, in reality, was an embodiment of his own wealth, not Lord Crowborough's; but he had come to the conclusion that it would say more for his social qualities to appear before the world as a guest whom Lord Crowborough wanted, than it would to appear as a host whom Lord Crowborough condescended to make use of. He posed, therefore, as a pensioner on what was really his own munificence, though he let it be known, by a few modest hints, that he could easily himself have a yacht if he wished it; and so successful was he in thus serving both his friend's interest and his own, that, whilst Mrs. Tilney was regarding Lord Crowborough with growing moral approbation, Mr. Reuben Quixano, as he leaned over the bulwarks with Lady Tregothran, found himself in the gathering twilight giving force to his observations by laying his hand occasionally unrebuked on hers.

CHAPTER XXIX

Lacy and Lady Madeleine meanwhile had arrived at Nice, each of them glad to have escaped from the party of pleasure, and to be with a companion by whom that feeling was shared. There was a considerable crowd on the platform, and their progress through it was slow. At last, however, they drew near the exit, and thought themselves on the point of escaping, when Lacy found himself impeded by an entirely unexpected obstacle. This was a man in a high state of excitement, who not only addressed him, but actually clutched him by the sleeve, as though determined at all costs to tell him or ask him something. Lacy shook himself free, and stared angrily at the stranger's face. It was a face that was pale and worried, and expressed exasperation at circumstances. He looked at it a second time; and then a light burst on him. It was the face of Mr. Millikin, who was indeed incongruously situated, being wedged in at that moment between two struggling *cocottes*.

"One word," cried Mr. Millikin — "one word — I must beg of you — I have come here on purpose to see you. I have just come straight from London."

"All right," said Lacy, "I'll wait outside;" and he briefly explained to Lady Madeleine who this gentleman was. He was hailing a cab when Mr. Millikin emerged, scented with patchouli for the first time in his life, puffing and panting, and too much preoccupied to be shy when he saw that Lacy had a lady under his charge. "When can I see you?" he said; "where can I have a talk with you?"

"Well," said Lacy, rather tartly, "I'm afraid neither now nor here. I must take this lady at once down to the harbour, to see some one on a yacht who is ill. It is utterly impossible

that I should wait a moment now. Are you staying here? If so, I will call on you after dinner."

"I want to see you," said Mr. Millikin, "about something which concerns you even more than me. I arrived from England only ten minutes ago. I have telegraphed for a room at the Angleterre, which I'm told is quiet and respectable. I'll wait for you there. I shan't leave the house till you come."

When Lacy and Lady Madeleine went off to the yacht together and inquired for Lady Dovedale, they experienced what was almost a shock on hearing that she was perfectly well again, and was having tea in the saloon. And there beyond doubt she was, looking indeed a little white, but, upon the whole, indignant rather than ill, as though the attack from which she had suffered had been a servant whom she had just dismissed for impertinence.

"My dear child," she exclaimed, as Lady Madeleine entered, "what on earth can have brought you here? You come in like a ghost. And who's that? Mr. Lacy? Have you all come back with the Helbecksteins?"

Lady Madeleine explained how Mrs. Helbeckstein's report had alarmed her. "I remember," she said, "how you suffered from one of these attacks before; so Mr. Lacy and I," she continued, trying to laugh off the matter, "thought we would come and see how you were getting on."

"I wonder," said Lady Dovedale, "how Mrs. Helbeckstein could be so ridiculous! My lungs are a little delicate. That's the reason I'm out here; but you and Mrs. Helbeckstein are worse than that impertinent little Poodle Brancepeth, who told me in London I was in perfectly rude health. Here, Mr. Lacy, touch that electric bell; you and Madeleine will want some tea for your trouble."

Having cleared her character from the imputation of any serious illness, Lady Dovedale's manner lost something of its asperity; and though she was conscious of an inclination to cough if she talked too much or too fast, she contrived to extract from the others a considerable amount of information about the events of the day, and their programme for that evening.

"Would you like me," said Lady Madeleine at last, "to stay here and keep you company at dinner, as you tell me that the Helbecksteins are dining at Monte Carlo?"

Lady Dovedale, though by no means passionately attached to her daughter, would have thought even her company rather better than none if she had not fancied she detected in Lady Madeleine's voice something of the patronising solicitude due to an invalid. She repelled the suggestion, therefore, in her briskest and curtest manner. "Certainly not," she said; "I shall be perfectly happy playing Patience; and you mustn't think of being so rude as to desert Lady Tregothran. Do you know, you two, that it's very nearly half-past six? Lord Crowborough's yacht ought to be here by seven; and it's high time for you to take yourself off to London House."

Lady Dovedale's anxiety to speed the parting guests proved to have been not untimely, for Lord Crowborough's yacht was in the harbour already; and when Lacy and Lady Madeleine reached the restaurant, they found that the others had just arrived before them. The dinner passed off as such dinners usually do. The saloon carriage of M. Monier Martin was to be attached to the train that left Nice for St. Estéphe at nine; and, such being the case, Lacy's promise to Mr. Millikin necessitated his waiting for the Paris express at midnight. Mr. Cyril Watson was only too delighted to find Lacy's responsibilities transferred to his own shoulders; though, for the matter of that, any party which contained Mrs. Tilney might have safely gone to Kamschatka without any other conductor. Lacy had expected that Lord Crowborough would have proposed to take them home in his yacht, and had wondered to find that the project had not been so much as mooted, till he heard Lord Crowborough, when he had finished his farewells to Miss Tilney, say something in a tone of relief to Mr. Reuben Quixano, which showed that the two had some other plan for amusing themselves — a masked ball, so it seemed, at some new pavilion near the sea. "And so," thought Lacy, as he went off to the Hôtel d'Angleterre, "their appetite for pleasure has survived even their surfeit of it at the New Rotunda."

On reaching the hotel he was inquiring for Mr. Millikin of the *concierge*, but he had hardly made his question intelligible before it was made superfluous by the rapid and agitated advance of Mr. Millikin himself, who it seemed had been waiting in the hall, so that Lacy should not possibly escape him.

"Come here," said Mr. Millikin, drawing him to a seat in the corner and frowning as though Lacy had committed some misdemeanour; "have you had any letter relating to Mr. Octavius Brandon's will?"

He asked this question with a solemnity so extreme that Lacy, fortified by the telegram he had received the previous night, felt his lips distending themselves into a smile which he could not resist. "Yes," he said, "to tell you the truth, I have."

"You astonish me," said Mr. Millikin. "This is anything but a laughing matter. It is one of the most serious matters for yourself, as well as for me, that is conceivable."

"I conclude," said Lacy, "your letter was a duplicate of mine, hinting that young Brandon, my cousin, was not really dead — that the person who really died was his illegitimate brother, and that the true heir was coming to turn us both out of our property."

"What!" exclaimed Mr. Millikin, with an astonished dropping of his jaw. "You got a letter telling you that?"

"I did," replied Lacy. "I got it the day before yesterday, though it seemed to have been written three or four days before. It was signed, 'James, Hawkins, & James, Solicitors.' I telegraphed to my own lawyers to find out who these men were; and I got an answer last night to say that no such firm existed. I can reassure you by telling you that the whole thing is a hoax — whose hoax I can't guess; but the letter was dated Ealing, so if we cared to find out, that might give us a clue."

"Ealing!" exclaimed Mr. Millikin. "Ealing — Ealing — Ealing! And you were threatened, you say, with young Brandon come to life again? Was it Bankside, Ealing? Did your letter bear that address?"

"It did," said Lacy.

"My own," said Mr. Millikin, "bears that address also; but mine is signed by a firm whose existence is real enough. It's in the *London Law Directory*, and in the *Suburban Directory* also; and Bankside, Ealing, is the residence of one of the partners. I've not answered the letter. I determined to see you first. It's some plot — some infamous plot. Allow me, if you please, to call your attention to this. It means trouble of some sort, unless I am much mistaken."

So saying, Mr. Millikin, with trembling hands, gave a letter to Lacy, which shook as he did so like an aspen-leaf. The printed address and the paper, Lacy at once saw, were precisely similar to those of the letter he had himself received; but the writing and the signature were different; and so in their details were the contents, though strangely enough, their practical upshot was the same. This letter, which was signed "C. & J. W. Fox," recalled to Mr. Millikin, with brief and business-like accuracy, the fact that under the will of the late Mr. Octavius Brandon he succeeded to such and such properties only because Mr. Brandon's sole legitimate son being dead, no other blood-relation of his was forthcoming, or believed to be in existence. The writer then proceeded to say that by a singular train of circumstances a blood-relation had been discovered, of whose kinship to the deceased gentleman they had abundant evidence in their possession. The nature of the case, however, was, so they hinted, such that the expense of legally substantiating, and also of contesting it, would be enormous; and it was hinted that if a compromise could be effected, without going to law, such a method of settlement might be advantageous to both parties. If, therefore, Mr. Millikin would be inclined to entertain such a suggestion, Messrs. C. & J. W. Fox would communicate further details.

When Lacy had read this through, he looked up and saw Mr. Millikin eying him with a mute interrogation almost ghastly in its anxious eagerness. This had on himself the effect of making him perversely calm. "The whole matter," he said, "I confess, is extremely odd; but the first letter being

obviously not genuine — I mean the one sent to me — it is possible, of course, that in this there may be no truth either."

"Possible!" said Mr. Millikin. "Do you say it is only possible? It is plain that the whole thing is a monstrous, infamous plot. It's a case vamped up by these lawyers, and one of these horrible women, or a child of one of them — a case of a pretended marriage — vamped up for the sake of extorting money from me and you. That is patent upon the face of it."

"Upon my word," said Lacy, "I can hardly see that. It is possible, though not likely, that Mr. Brandon may have had some cousin of whose existence he was not aware himself."

"Anything's possible," said Mr. Millikin, bitterly; "but this is a fraud on the face of it — a palpable and impudent fraud. The question for us is how we can most promptly crush it. You take the matter so coolly one would think that you were not concerned in it. Do you realise what it would mean to you if there were any truth in this letter? You stand exactly in the same pair of shoes as I do."

"Look here," said Lacy, "will you come and see me to-morrow? Or I will come over to you. We can do nothing now. To-morrow we can settle what is to be done — if anything."

"My dear Kitten," Mr. Millikin wrote that night to his wife, exhibiting in his use of this graceful term of endearment a side of his character so sacred that it was hidden from the world at large — "I have reached this place — this abominable place — in safety. For the first time in my life I am thankful you are not with me. It is not a place fit for a modest woman. On arriving at the station, the first person I saw was Mr. Lacy. He was in the company of some over-dressed, and I have no doubt painted, woman. She was a lady; if she had not been, I should not, of course, have mentioned her. I could barely succeed in getting him to grant me a five-minutes' interview. He is so besotted by this worldly life he is leading — I shrink from applying to it any harsher word — that he hardly appears to realise the magnitude of the interests that are threatened.

But I am going to-morrow to see him at his house, and confer with him. Never doubt that all will go well. He has plenty of shrewd sense and promptitude, if he would only apply them to serious and sacred subjects. Dearest love to the chicks from their loving father, and your loving husband" — and here followed Mr. Millikin's pet name — "MOUSIE."

Whilst Mr. Millikin was penning this touching epistle, Lacy found himself pacing the illuminated streets of Nice, and wondering what he should do with himself for the next two weary hours. The sight of a huge structure, composed principally of glass and iron, and now shining with lamplight, as if it were a white-hot furnace, supplied him with an answer to his question. This was the Pavilion, in which the masked ball was taking place; and his eyes, as he passed by the door, were caught by a shop, or office, at which costumes for the occasion could be hired. He had thought, not so long ago, when he emerged from the New Rotunda, that he would never take part in a function of this kind again. But Mr. Millikin's news had had a more powerful effect on him than similar news, or news of a similar purport, had had, whilst he thought it might be genuine, a few days ago. Though he did not, even now, seriously accept it as true, it had produced in his mind a curious forlorn blankness, as though over all his prospects there had descended a sudden fog. In this mood he welcomed anything that offered him the semblance of distraction; and, hiring a monk's dress, with a cowl that would obscure, without hiding, his face, he bought a ticket and made his way into the Pavilion. The scene bore a family likeness to that presented by the New Rotunda; but it differed from it in being more crowded, and incalculably more lively. He had hardly been in the place five minutes before several pairs of lips, with eyes above them glittering through velvet masks, had assailed his ear with the blandishments of their metallic voices. He had already repelled laughingly several of these overtures, and was beginning to doubt whether he would not be more complaisant to a slim little Watteau shepherdess whom he saw moving towards him, when he suddenly became aware

of the presence of Mr. Reuben Quixano, whose dark complexion and eyes were set off by the costume of a bull-fighter. But Mr. Quixano himself had occupied him for a moment only, when his attention was caught by a figure enveloped in a black domino. Lacy felt at once that he had seen this apparition before. Could it be? — it must be — yes, it was his fortune-teller of the New Rotunda. So at least he told himself; and, dominated by this impression, he stood rooted to the spot, staring at his supposed friend. His scrutiny had not lasted for more than a few seconds when he realised that the black domino was paying him the same attention, which, if his surmise were correct, was not altogether inexplicable. A moment later he felt that he had not been deceived, for he saw the black domino beckoning to him with an unmistakable gesture, and she began herself to move a little towards him. Had his mind and spirits been less perturbed than they were, his impulse would have been to avoid her. As it was, he was presently at her side; and he heard her say to him in her delicate and well-remembered voice: "My pilgrim has become a monk since I told his fortune last. Will his vows prevent him from showing me his hand once more? If they will not, let him follow me. I think that Nice, like London, can give us solitude in the middle of a crowd."

She made her way, as though the building were familiar to her, to a staircase which mounted to a passage lit with rose-coloured lights. "It is my turn," she said to Lacy, "to provide a box to-night." She opened a door with a key, and they found themselves in a discreet twilight, which the half-drawn curtains produced in spite of the blazing ballroom.

"I am sorry," began Lacy, "to have met you, for I must leave you almost directly. I should have to leave you, even if you did not dismiss me."

"Give me your hands once more," the unknown said to him. "Let me see if even in this twilight I cannot read something new in them. Yes — I can read this. A line which was almost obliterated is now growing firmer and clearer. That is the line of success. The change in it is strongly marked. And now — what is this? In the line of

the heart too — there is some slight change there. But this change means something of which you are not as yet conscious. Let me look again. No, no. I see nothing else that is new; but I have seen enough to make me wish to congratulate you on your improved fortunes."

"You have read my hands," said Lacy. "Let me hold yours. As long as I hold them, I don't care what I say to you. My beautiful clairvoyante, there is something you have not read. You have looked at my line of fortune. You promise me some near success. I think now I may achieve it, for I won't let circumstances get the better of me. I shall probably exert myself and succeed. But if I do so, it will be for a reason of which you know nothing, and which, till an hour ago, I hardly believed myself. It has not had time yet to leave a scar on my hand; and I certainly shall not allow it to leave a scar on my life. You speak of my fortunes; but you — but you say nothing about my fortune; and to judge from something which I heard an hour ago, my fortune exists no longer. It has left me even more quickly than it came to me. News has reached me from England that the person whose wealth I inherited has left relations who are his legal heirs. One letter told me that his son, who was supposed to be dead, is living. Another tells me that, even if the son is dead, there is some next-of-kin to be produced, whose rights will extinguish mine."

The unknown clasped his hands as if his communication startled her, and dragging him a little towards the light, with a force that was almost roughness, affected to be once more absorbed in the examination of his palms.

"I see," she said, "not all you have told me; but I see some of it. Two dangers threaten your property. Both dangers may be shadows. One certainly is so. It is a shadow that threatens you from across the sea. You need, I think, not fear that. I won't ask for your name; but I will ask for one thing, which your hand does not reveal to me. Give me an address — an initial, if you like, at a post-office; and I may, next week, have something more to communicate to you. You may find me possessed of still stranger powers of clair-

voyance than those which you have already experienced; but which, in spite of that, you don't believe in. Here, write the address on this ticket. I will slip it inside my glove. And now I am going to make one short prophecy more. You will say good-bye to me at once; you will leave me in this box, and, without losing a moment, you will take a cab to the station."

CHAPTER XXX

Lacy reached home at four o'clock in the morning, having driven from St. Estéphe station. His temperament was one in which optimism and pessimism were curiously united, not as antagonists, but as allies. Whenever he was threatened by the possibility of any misfortune or inconvenience, from the loss of a pleasure to the treachery of a trusted friend, without believing the worst, his instinct was to assume it, and having assumed it, to prepare himself for bearing it in the best way.

He rose early and went out into the garden. Do what he could to control his thoughts and feelings, the scenery and the climate seemed to have undergone some change; but instead of dwelling on his perception of this fact, he concentrated his mind on the practical details of the situation. Starting with the supposition that the worst which could happen to him was about to happen, he made a mental calculation of what his own position would be. He was an excellent man of business; but in order to be sure of his arithmetic, he at last stood still, and breaking a twig from a bush, did a short sum with it on the dewy blade of an aloe.

"What a mercy," he said to himself, "that I am not married — that I have no children. Most people's misfortunes, like most people, I should bear better than my own. My wife's and children's I should bear a great deal worse. In any case, I shall not be reduced to going about in rags; and I shall manage, through my uncle, to get my election expenses paid. Such poverty I can bear. From this moment I put off all thoughts of myself as a rich man, like a coat not mine which I had put on by mistake."

And then, through all these reflections, which had sadness in them, despite their fortitude, the young moist air of the

morning found its way into his consciousness. It came to him fresh from the secret heart of Nature — sad also, but passionate with its whisper of unfulfilled possibilities.

As he stood there he was startled by a slight stir of the gravel. He looked up, and before him was Lady Madeleine Seaton.

"I'm sure," he said to her, laughing, "dissipation must be a good tonic, since it got us both out of bed so much sooner than usual."

"I'm afraid," she replied, looking closely at him, "that if one judged by your face, one would think you wanted a tonic rather than that you had had one. Is anything the matter? Is it anything about that letter? Or is it, perhaps — may I ask you — anything about Estelle?"

He put his arm in hers and drew her towards the aloe. "Do you see these figures," he said, "written there in the wet? I've been doing a sum. I've been counting up how much I shall probably have to live upon. As for the letter, that one I showed you is nothing. But the man who spoke to me at Nice — there is something behind it all — he has had a letter of a very different kind, which comes, however, to the same thing. Let us walk on, and I will tell you about it."

She listened to him in absolute silence; and then, when he had finished, she said, speaking with difficulty, "Does it make you very anxious? Tell me — tell me — tell me!"

"Your kindness," he answered, "touches me more than I know how to tell you. Any uncertainty of this kind is a strain; but the worst that is possible, when I know it, will be hardly even a burden. At the worst I shall merely be what I was some months ago, with some pleasant memories added; and amongst those memories will be you."

"There is a grey, wet spider's web," she said, "on the collar of your coat. Stand still for a moment, and I will brush it off for you."

At breakfast Lacy had recovered his usual manner. To all appearances he was in better spirits than usual. And yet, on the sideboard was something which wore an ominous aspect. It was a letter directed in a handwriting which he had seen

the night before. He put off opening it until he should be again alone, and discussed with his friends gaily the expedition of yesterday.

Shortly after breakfast Mr. Millikin was to arrive at the château. He preferred to visit Lacy there, rather than to receive him at Nice, partly because he had, with an ingrained asceticism, denied himself at his hotel the luxury of a private sitting-room, and partly because, as soon as he had seen Lacy, he intended to return to England, and consequently the château was on his way.

Lacy, whilst waiting for his arrival, opened the ominous letter. The address and the signature were the same as in that shown him by Mr. Millikin. It was not, however, a duplicate. It was dated some days later. It contained, moreover, an additional piece of intelligence, which was indeed not more than partially new to him, but which, coming from the present quarter, instead of disarming his apprehensions, seemed to give to the rest of the letter a more menacing character. It also recalled to his mind, with an added sense of mystery, the strange decision of tone in which the unknown clairvoyante had told him that one of his dangers was nothing more than a shadow. He was still reflecting in his library on the strange facts of the situation when Mr. Millikin was announced, and entered, pale and soured with care. The lines in his face, which usually expressed sanctity, seemed to have hired themselves out for the occasion to the service of mundane anxiety.

Lacy asked him if he had breakfasted. "Yes — yes — thank you," he answered, with nervous asperity; "I've had everything, thank you, that I want."

"Well," said Lacy, "then let me read you this."

"You *have* had a letter, then?" exclaimed Mr. Millikin, eagerly.

"Yes," answered Lacy, "it has just come. Will you listen to it?"

"Sir, — We wrote you a letter four days ago, a copy being sent at the same time to Charles James Millikin, of Buxton,

Esq., whose position, in reference to the matter, we believe to be identical with your own; but the letter addressed to yourself has been returned to us, owing to an error in the direction. In case you should not have heard with regard to it from Mr. C. J. Millikin, we shall presently recapitulate our advice to that gentleman. It is necessary for us first, however, in our own defence, to mention to you, and apologise for, an occurrence which we need describe no further than by saying that it was no more than an indecent practical joke, perpetrated, as we deem, at our expense, no less than at yours, and one of which no member or employee of our firm had cognisance. We refer to a letter, written on our paper, containing some story of the supposed survival of the late Octavius Brandon, Junior, Esq., whose death, we may mention, is as certain as that of the late Queen Anne.

"But whilst expressing our regret that such a letter should have reached you from our address, we fear it is our duty to repeat and confirm the intelligence, which we fear you will not find more welcome, already communicated by us to Mr. C. J. Millikin. The will of Mr. Octavius Brandon has been carefully examined by us. It provides, as you are aware, that such of his property as remained, after the payment of the legacies to certain specified persons, should go to his next-of-kin, other than his eldest son, if any such should be surviving. Failing such next-of-kin, it was to go to the said eldest son; and in the event of the eldest son dying without issue, it was to go — as we need hardly say — to Mr. C. J. Millikin and yourself.

"Matters standing thus, it is our duty to advise you that, owing to a train of remarkable circumstances, which we cannot at this moment disclose, evidence has been placed in our hands which renders it morally certain that a kinsman of Mr. Brandon's is still living, and will, if the relationship can be established, be heir to those portions of the property now held respectively by Mr. C. J. Millikin and yourself.

"The evidence already in our hands is of the strongest possible character, and we shall, at the proper moment, be able to submit it to your examination. There are in it, however,

certain technical flaws which would render the establishment of the claim now referred to a matter of great expense; and we believe that the claimant, on whose behalf we are speaking, would be willing, in consideration of this fact, to settle the matter by some kind of compromise. Before asking you to come to any decision, we shall be prepared to submit to you and your legal advisers the entire evidence in our hands, so that you may judge whether the strength of our case warrants the above proposal. Your housekeeper in London has communicated to us your present address; we therefore send you this direct. — Awaiting the favour of an early reply, we are, sir, your obedient servants,

"C. & J. W. Fox,
"Bankside Road, Ealing."

Mr. Millikin's hand descended heavily on the table by which he was seated.

Lacy offered him a cigar. Mr. Millikin refused it with a pettish gesture of aversion. Lacy took one himself, and began slowly to light it.

"Well," said Mr. Millikin, presently, with a squeak of irritation in his voice, "may I ask what you propose to do? My position is this — that though this fraudulent and absurd claim can naturally never be proved, it might, in consequence of Mr. Brandon's abominable life, cost us a great deal of money and much stirring up of mud to disprove it."

"I fear," said Lacy, "that I differ from you as to one point. I do not myself feel by any means able to dismiss this claim as fraudulent before we've heard more about it."

"Very well, then," said Mr. Millikin, with ironical calm, "let us throw up the sponge at once. Let us write to this unknown swindler, and say — what shall we say? here, I will compose the letter — 'Dear Swindler,' — suppose we begin like that — 'We are in receipt of your letter, and are struck dumb by being convicted of the guilt of possessing property to which we know we have no claim. We beg you will instruct us how to make over the same to you, which we will do on hearing from you, and by return of post. There is one point

we would beg you not to forget, and that is, to inform us of your name and sex — not that this has anything to do with our recognition of your claim, but merely that we ought to know it, so as to insert it in the necessary documents.' "

"I doubt if we gain much," said Lacy, "by taking the matter in this way. Even if all this money goes, we are neither of us worse off than we were before it came to us."

"You have no wife and children," replied Mr. Millikin. "You have no sense of responsibility. If you had, you could not possibly — possibly — possibly — talk in this insensate, this cynical, this mad, this unprincipled way. Do you propose to sit still, with your hands folded, and to do absolutely nothing?"

"On the contrary," said Lacy, "I propose — if you will give me time to speak — to write to these gentlemen, Messrs. C. & J. W. Fox, on your behalf and mine, and ask them to communicate with my lawyers and yours as soon as they are in a position to put their case before us. I should tell them that till they could do that, we could give them no answer of any kind beyond acknowledging and thanking them for their communication. Then I propose, for my own part, to make an inquiry by telegram, which you, if you are returning to London, will be able to make personally. I propose to inquire of my own lawyers who Messrs. C. & J. W. Fox are, and what kind of character they bear. I agree with you that they have most probably taken up this case as a speculation, and that they are feeling their way by writing to us from their private address. As to the letter, we may as well compose it now. If you will let me sit at the table, I will show you what I propose to say. Five lines will be sufficient. There," he said presently, "I think that is civil and to the point. We will, if you approve, send it by the midday post."

"I'll post it myself," said Mr. Millikin, who now looked nervously at his watch. "I must be going back to the station. I promised to return to Mrs. Millikin at the earliest moment possible. I went to Nice because I fancied that your house was in that neighbourhood. Your address was sent after me by telegraph, and I did not get it till this morning. I

have brought my luggage with me, and have left it at St. Estéphe."

"Well, then," said Lacy, "I will come to St. Antoine with you, and send off my own telegram. If you will wait for a minute or two, I will tell my friends I shall be out. I will lunch at the little hotel in the village. I will also, with your permission, write one short note, which I will post when I send my telegram." He seated himself again at the table, and wrote the following lines: —

"Dear Lady Tregothran, — I have fully considered your suggestion that I should stand next June at Manchester; and I need not wait to discuss it with you till you come back from Nice. So far as my own willingness is concerned, your advice has already made a convert of me. Certain difficulties have arisen, however, of which I was unaware when you spoke to me; but they are difficulties which my uncle could, and I think will be willing to, remove. I am going this afternoon to put the whole matter before him; and I hope when we meet again that I may appear to you as a satisfactory specimen of the result of your influence and your very undeserved kindness. — I am, sincerely yours,

"Tristram Brandon Lacy."

He then repaired to the drawing-room, where he found Mr. Cyril Watson, who had a general invitation to present himself whenever he liked. From him Lacy learned that Lord Runcorn had driven to St. Tropez with Mrs. Mordaunt, and, in all probability, would not return till sunset. It would, therefore, be useless to go to the Villa Martin earlier. Lacy's manner, as he mixed in the conversation, was pleasant and composed as usual, but everything about him seemed somehow to be far away. He saw Mrs. St. Germans, her granddaughter, and the young secretary as if he were looking at them through the wrong end of a telescope. Lady Madeleine alone retained her accustomed aspect for him. But, in spite of her presence, he felt that he would sooner be alone. He was glad of the excuse for absenting himself which Mr. Millikin's presence

offered; and he set out with him resolving that he would not return till dinner-time.

From the foot of the hills, amongst the woods of which the château stood, the village of St. Antoine could be reached in two ways — by taking the road to the station, or by walking along the broad white beach. Of these Lacy chose the latter, as it had the considerable advantage of hastening his liberation from the company of Mr. Millikin; and he was presently walking across the strip of sandy common by which the beach was separated from the road, his eyes, as he went, fixing themselves now and then on the roofs and the garden walls of Mrs. Norham's Utopia.

A quarter of a mile beyond this, a few rocks rose out of the sand, and received, when the wind was easterly, some stray splashes from the waves. Over these rocks lay the way to the seaward end of St. Antoine. The scene to-day, though it was somewhat bare, was brilliant. The rocks were tepid with sunshine; the water laughed between them in ultramarine pools; on the shoulder of land above, the little white houses glittered. As Lacy approached this spot, he became conscious of a faint noise, which seemed at first like a whisper of the sea drawn faintly back amongst pebbles, then like a dog snuffing with its nose amongst damp seaweed. He stopped to listen. He heard it several times, but could not discover its origin, till resuming his course, and beginning to climb the rocks, he suddenly saw before him, amongst their medley of dazzling greyness, a blot of absolute blackness, with the outlines of a human form. The form was that of a woman. By her side was a basket, filled with some small paper parcels.

Involuntarily Lacy stood still and looked at her. His eyes caught her in the act of being shaken with a sob against which she struggled. The sound of his footsteps, or the sudden cessation of the sound, roused her. She looked up with a shamefaced effort to assume an indifferent smile. Lacy realised, with surprise and concern, that he was in the presence of Mrs. Prouse Bousefield. Her eyes, unless she had been crying, did her a grave injustice; but she managed to bring her mouth into a shape suitable to conversation, and sought to

cover her confusion in the bustle of an attempt to rise. Lacy affected a total unconsciousness of anything unusual in her aspect, and greeted her with demonstrative cordiality, himself sitting down near her.

She seemed pleased with this attention; and when he said, with a glance at her basket, "You have, I suppose, been marketing for the benefit of your whole colony," she answered him with a fluttering laugh, as if he had achieved a witticism. "If I'm not good for much else," she said, "I can give myself a testimonial for my power of marketing, at all events. But it is a queer French indeed that they talk in the market here. It makes me laugh to listen to it. And the flowers are beautiful; but frequently you will hardly be smelling them for the garlic." She laughed again; and Lacy was wondering why, when she solved the question by suddenly breaking down, and pressed against her eyes a pocket-handkerchief already damp. "Forgive me, Mr. Lacy," she faltered, "but I'm not just myself this morning."

"I hope," said Lacy, kindly, "that you have had no bad news. I fear I have done wrong in disturbing you. You would like, perhaps, to be left by yourself. When I have had things to trouble me, I have often felt the same; and, indeed, I must be going anyhow, for I am on my way to the telegraph-office."

She looked at him with eyes that thanked him, though still brimming with tears. He had hardly risen and turned his back on her when she seemed to have forgotten him altogether. Her head fell forward, and he heard her muttering to herself, "I've been used by him very badly. I don't see the good of living — and that woman! — that woman! — that woman! — that hateful, hateful woman!" As these words reached him, his thoughts went back to the occasion on which first he met her, when, happiness pursing itself on her lips, she chronicled for his benefit Mr. Bousefield's domestic tastes, her pride in his greatness betraying itself even through her mention of his affection for his cat.

When Lacy reached the telegraph-office, and composed and despatched his message, his own anxieties reasserted them-

selves; and, indeed, they were not allayed when a clerk delivered to him an unusually bulky letter, which, in the ordinary course of events, would not have reached him till the evening. He put it into his pocket, meaning to read it while he had his luncheon; and was wondering what could be contained in it, when all thoughts of his own affairs were disturbed by a fragment of conversation to which he found himself an unwilling listener.

He was walking along a street of the village, on one side of which was a bank; and along the bank to the street descended a slanting pathway, hidden by a parapet from the sight of those below. Suddenly, through the silence, which seemed to pervade everything, he heard a sound of voices proceeding from the heights above, which grew rapidly clearer, till they were recognisable as the voices of a man and woman. They were not loud voices, but they were charged with an earnest emphasis which soon rendered distinct every syllable uttered by them. The speakers were now directly over Lacy's head; and before he knew where he was, he heard a man's voice, speaking thus: —

"Jealousy, my dear friend — jealousy — the jealousy of an excellent, a God-fearing, but imperfectly educated woman — that's what the trouble comes from! I pray every night to God that both she and we may be relieved from it; but if this is not to be, you and I must help each other to bear our burdens. You yourself have often told us that those who work for others must be prepared to suffer from misunderstandings. Here is our cross; let us carry its weight between us."

Then came another voice, obviously a woman's, in answer. "The most painful part of the whole affair is that this — this mad — if I may call it so — this mad outburst of selfism comes from the very heart of what I, more than all women, regard as a holy sacrament — namely, marriage. But I — even I — can hardly speak of this to you. To you the pain of it must be so intimate — so exquisite."

In order to avoid being an eavesdropper, Lacy had first quickened his pace, then he had somewhat slackened it, and finally he had stood still; but he had heard enough to reveal

to him who the hidden speakers were. Presently, as he looked in front of him, their two heads became visible — the one adorned with a bonnet severely plain, the other with a soft and shapeless wide-awake hat. At length they had reached the roadway in which he himself stood, and he felt himself free to go forward. They seemed, however, determined to have him as their auditor in spite of himself; for at the bottom of the descending path they paused till he came close to them, and once again a part of their conversation reached him.

"You had better go," said the lady. "Yes — go and find her. Treat her as if nothing had happened. Exert for her benefit your admirable gift of temper. Ask her the price of vegetables. Remember — indeed, you never forget — your sacred marriage-debt to her, not least sacred when heaviest; and oh, if you feel it hard to bear and to forbear — if you feel it hard — call to mind what I said only the other night, and think that what you are doing to her, you are really doing to Humanity. Go — I say — go. I will walk home by myself."

Mr. Bousefield was turning, in obedience to this high bidding, when he saw Lacy, who was now but a few feet off. He pulled himself together, and spoke with a semblance of his accustomed geniality.

"Ha, Mr. Lacy," he exclaimed, "what a capital day for exercise. We're all out this morning — Mrs. Norham, Mrs. Bousefield, and myself — making the best of our time before we pack up our traps. Very soon, in detachments, we begin going back to London. You didn't happen to see my good wife in the village, did you?"

"I did," Lacy answered, "I saw her over there, by the shore."

"Ah," cried Mr. Bousefield, "capital! Off I must go to look for her."

"Well, Mr. Lacy," said Mrs. Norham, when Mr. Bousefield had left them, "and how have you been since I last had the pleasure of seeing you?" There was in her face and manner a certain repellent grimness, under which, only half-disguised, lay an acidulated desire to converse. "Are you going my way?" she continued. "If so, we might walk together."

He expressed his willingness to accompany her as far as the little hotel, where he told her he was going to lunch.

"Our own *déjeuner*," Mrs. Norham replied, "is over; but if you would put up with Marsala and some humble sandwiches, I can give you that in my sitting-room. I should be glad to talk to you for a little, and ask you what impression you received the other night from our gathering. There was a good account of it given both in the *Daily News* and the *Agnostic Moralist*."

CHAPTER XXXI

Mrs. Norham, although, when she gave her invitation to Lacy, there was nothing very effusive, or indeed very gracious, in her manner, was at heart eager for his company. Her passionate sense of the gloriousness of the altruistic secret, and the organic functionalism of herself as its most gifted exponent, her passionate love of the human kind in general, and her passionate contempt of the fashionable classes in particular, had all been kept at fever-heat, since the day of her service, by the incredible deficiency which the fashionable classes at St. Hilaire had shown by their continued neglect to pay her the least attention; and she longed to discover how Lacy had been impressed by her ministrations, and to hear the impression which his account of them must have produced at the Villa Martin. As for him personally, she was piqued by him as much as ever. If he was so hardened in heart that she could not communicate the truth to him, she would at all events chasten him by showing him that he did not possess it, and that he cut a very miserable figure in comparison with herself, who did. By such discipline, she thought, his soul might be saved at last.

Accordingly, no sooner had he accepted her invitation, than she at once began her attack on him; and now that she was secure of his company, she allowed the tone of her voice to convey to him how much she despised it.

"And so," she said, giving her words the edge of a fine irony, "you have been having, I hear, a most delightful and satisfactory time, with your dinner-parties, your dances afterwards, and so forth. You will hardly tell me that you have not found happiness now, since you pass your days amongst people whose sole occupation is to look for it, and who — I

must say this for them — find pleasure in trifles which the children of the functional classes outgrow before they leave the schoolroom."

"I told you once before," he replied, "that I find no materials for anything like reasonable happiness in myself; and such being the case, I am not likely to find them elsewhere. But if the society to which you refer, and in which I was born and bred, fails to make me regard life with any serious satisfaction, society of any other kind would not supply my want better. It would alter my feelings only, by adding to them those of an exile."

This observation brought them to Mrs. Norham's door. "Come in," she said, "and let me have all this out with you."

She took him into her library; she seated herself on a chair opposite him, and resumed with increased solemnity: "Mr. Lacy, I talk like this to you because I see glimpses in you of better things, better than this mood of pessimism — this indifference, which I may call the foppery of the intellect — this mooning and effeminate sadness."

"I assure you," said Lacy, "if I am a pessimist, I don't take my pessimism sadly. I have stayed sometimes at a dozen country-houses in succession, and no one has ever heard me so much as heave a sigh."

"Country-houses!" exclaimed Mrs. Norham. "Yes — *I* know your country-houses. The Villa Martin is one of them. No wonder you are sad, if you spend your life there — places where a functional observation is uttered only to be disregarded. The only wonder is you do not feel mentally dead. Mr. Lacy, let me plead with you. You know the inward change which Christians call conversion. It is a genuine change, but they have called it by a wrong name, and diverted it to mistaken purposes. We of the new Church have our own conversions likewise; but they are conversions, not to the contemplation of Heaven, but to the service of social man. Let me, like a moral physician, lay my finger on that which ails you. You think you are unhappy in spite of the world you live in. You are really unhappy because of it. What I said the other night might surely have whispered this to you.

You are unhappy because the world you live in cuts you off, as it cuts off all its other members, from all organic connection with the great social whole. Ah, Mr. Lacy, let me tempt you to make the experiment of doing something for those outside your own circle — of giving to those in want just some few crumbs of the talents which at present fall unregarded from your intellectual table."

Mrs. Norham here found that the words "crumbs" and "table" reminded her of her promise to provide some refreshment for her visitor, and fearful that if she failed to do so he might leave her before his regeneration was complete, she interrupted herself in her arguments, and with an almost maternal smile said, "Well — and now I will go and order your luncheon."

When she had left the room, Lacy took the opportunity of glancing at the letter which he had just received at the post-office. It was from his agent at home, and contained a voluminous enclosure. He was still engaged in examining it when his hostess once more appeared, actually deigning to bring with her his luncheon in her own hands. "I will spare you," she said, "while you're eating; but I have not half done with you. That idle life of yours will have to feel my lash again — that idle life which, making you miserable yourself, makes you regard misery as the natural condition of mankind."

"Well," said Lacy, laughing, "as you are not going to attack me while I eat, I will at least keep myself in countenance by defending myself against this last thrust of yours. I am not miserable. I am as far from misery as from happiness. Just as Christians have been known, in the daily work of the world, to forget the glories of heaven, so do I, for my part, forget the emptiness of the earth. The Christian and I differ only in moments of reflection. The more he reflects, the more significant life seems to him. The more I reflect, the less significant it seems to me. When we both of us look at the surface of it, it seems much the same to both of us — except that I, as I have seen during the past few days, can take its troubles with more resignation than he. And now, my dear Mrs. Norham," Lacy continued, "whilst I am en-

trenched behind this rampart of sandwiches, I am going to fire a shot in defence of my idle life before it quivers again under the further terrors of your lash."

Mrs. Norham thought Lacy's tone was most unbecomingly confident for one whom she had been exhibiting to himself as a pitiable moral invalid. But she forbore to interrupt him, and contented herself with a solemn gaze at him. "I am," he continued, "grateful for the interest which you take in my life; but you are only, permit me to say so, acquainted with a few weeks of it. You see me here enjoying a short holiday; and even here you know little of the way in which I spend my days. As for the rest of my life, ever since I left Oxford, whether as a soldier, a secretary, or a member of Parliament, though many men may have worked better, few have worked harder than I. And now, since I came into some money, my work has been harder still, — not for people of my own world, but for people quite outside it. Two hundred and ten labourers' cottages have been or are being rebuilt, redrained, or repaired by me. In three villages which I own I have laid out recreation grounds, with little club-houses attached to them for the use of cricketers and football players. Perhaps, without vanity, I may be allowed to show you this, which I have but this moment received, and which has come to me as a complete surprise."

He handed to Mrs. Norham the letter which he had just been reading; and Mrs. Norham, with a grudging acquiescence, took it and deigned to examine it. Her expression was like that of a school-mistress looking over an exercise, which she feared or hoped to find full of gross mistakes. The letter, written by Lacy's agent, was as follows: —

"Dear Sir, — A spontaneous movement is on foot amongst the labourers and other cottagers on the Lacy, the Abbot's Lacy, and the Southwick properties, to present an Address to you on your return to England, thanking you for the minute and unremitting care you have shown for their wants and welfare from the first moment that you had the means of doing so. They desire to do also, what I believe will be even more

pleasing to yourself — to express their sense, not only of your liberality as a landlord, but of the personal kindness and consideration which you have shown to each one of them individually. The women, in particular, are anxious to add their own names to those of their husbands: and I have been asked to inquire of you when you may likely be again at home, with a view to inducing you to name some date on which you would allow the Address to be presented to you. I enclose herewith a list of the names, which it may interest you to look over."

When Mrs. Norham had finished reading this, she looked as though she had swallowed a disagreeable dose of medicine; but her natural candour had presently a hard-won triumph, and she said to Lacy, as she handed the letter back to him: "So you act on our doctrine after all, though you have not the courage to confess it. Do you mean to tell me that you derive no pleasure from learning that all these poor people have derived some benefit from your action?"

"I am touched by this letter," he said, "more, perhaps, than you suspect. I have long been unhappy at the thought that these people were so ill-housed. But why should a sense on my part that I have helped to house them well give me any serious belief in the value of human life, when I know how easy it is for the best-housed men to be miserable?"

"Ah," exclaimed Mrs. Norham, eagerly, having now quite recovered herself, "I have run you to earth at last. You are nearer the truth; but you have ruined it thus far completely. The aim of your cottage-building and so forth is not to give your cottagers culture — to make them mentally your own equals. It is to make them content with their inferiority. This is not altruism, my friend. It is the mere Theistic duty to your neighbour, which is the very negation of altruism. If you would be an altruist, try, when you go back to your dependants, to make them as good as you, to endow them with the same tastes and appreciations. To do this will, indeed, lead ultimately to some rather strange social changes. The labourer will no longer then be hat in hand to the squire. But you — you surely can rise superior to the poor selfism of class. Sacrifice that — and oh, what a world of blessedness

will be open to you! Mr. Lacy," said Mrs. Norham, very soberly, "I am not speaking at random. I have to-day, in spite of certain annoyances, caused by the moral selfism of one nearly, though not functionally, associated with us — I have experienced myself some of that blessedness which I am promising you. I have witnessed the birth to the world of my young tailor poet. He is my Aaron's rod that has budded. His book came out two or three days ago; but our own copies have only just arrived: and this morning he has received a little sheaf of reviews. My influence and Mr. Bousefield's have secured him early notices; and he's gone off somewhere by himself to read them. How I envy him the passion of feeling, the exquisite fresh thrill which will be his on realising how the finest spirits of the time recognise his genius and respond to it, like the sea under a breeze that touches it. Here for me is a realisation of altruistic blessedness, if you like, when I think that but for me he still might be stitching trousers. We — Mr. Bousefield and I — have guaranteed him for two years the income he was making by his trade, in order to give him time to develop himself. Mr. Lacy, it is by works like these that you may know the Church of the Future — the Church of the New Discovery. See," Mrs. Norham continued, plunging her hand into a half-opened paper parcel, and extracting a volume brilliant in crimson cloth, "here is a copy of his book. Take it with you and read it; and as you read it, think not only of it, but of the world-promise which perfumes this blossom. Yet a little while, Mr. Lacy, and I think you will know us better."

Lacy put the book in his pocket, and was just rising to go, when the door was pushed violently open, and a French maid-servant entered. She was a girl of the country, and her cheeks were naturally a sun-burnt olive; but now they were strikingly pale, and her eyes were round with agitation. "Madame," she gasped, "could I see madame for a moment?" In response to her tone and look, Mrs. Norham started up, and hastily retreated with the maid to the little vestibule outside. Lacy presently heard her exclaiming in her best French accent, "Mon Dieu, mon Dieu! Mais c'est terrible. Le

pauvre garçon — le pauvre garçon!" A moment later he was conscious of a man's voice, addressing Mrs. Norham in a tone of official gravity. The door had been left open, and as the speaker proceeded, his words, at each sentence, became more emphatic and audible. He was evidently a Commissary of Police, and he was showing Mrs. Norham some papers. Presently it seemed that he called forward a companion; and then another voice, more distinct than his own, recited a narrative of which Lacy heard every word. The man had, he said, witnessed the event himself. The deceased, whose appearance struck him as that of a madman, had been seated on a slope overlooking the St. Tropez line, and was reading various papers, which at first seemed to excite him, for he had gesticulated wildly with his hands; but he subsequently became quite still. The speaker had not been twenty yards away from him, and was still observing him with curiosity, when the engine of the train from St. Estéphe, puffing and steaming, showed itself round the corner. Before he realised what had happened, the subject of his observations had risen, and, with the nimbleness of a rabbit, had darted down the bank. "I blinked," said the man, "to assure myself that my eyes had not deceived me. By the time I had blinked twice the last of the carriages had gone over him, and he was lying by the permanent way like a torn bundle of rags."

On this there followed a series of solemn whisperings; and then in another moment Mrs. Norham re-entered. Her face wore an expression of a very peculiar kind. It was full of unspeakable tragedy, and yet it was touched with a certain kind of sheepishness. Lacy was horrified to find that, for some subtle reason, it filled him with a most undignified and inappropriate desire to laugh.

"There has been an accident," said Mrs. Norham, "a terrible, a ghastly accident. It appears that Mr. Squelch has just been killed by the train. They are bringing the body here. There can be no doubt that it is he. Here are all his reviews. You will see his name at the top of them."

She threw down by Lacy some cuttings from several newspapers; and planting her elbow on the chimney-piece, and

burying her forehead in her hand, she stood there, rigid in a majesty of marble calm. Lacy meanwhile began casting his eye over the reviews; and a suspicion which was already in his mind at once turned into a certainty. The reviews, which were taken from leading literary journals, instead of containing astonished and reverential praise, treated the tailor's verse in a spirit of caustic merriment compared with which the tone of the article which killed Keats was fulsome. Lacy, as he read, was in a state of extreme distress. Do what he would to banish it, the memory of Mrs. Norham's face, with its mixture of tragedy and sheepishness, would intervene between him and the paper; and though he bit his lip and struggled to obtain control of himself, his muscles at last gave way, and laughter began to break from him. It was at first a sound which might have passed muster as sobbing; but, as it always does in such cases, it nourished itself in its own enormity, and presently when Mrs. Norham, for some reason relapsing into French, repeated her ejaculation of "Le pauvre garçon — le pauvre garçon," Lacy's self-control altogether gave way, and his laughter broke from him in all its naked hideousness.

For a few moments not a single word was uttered. Then, pulling himself together, Lacy rose from his seat, and said gravely, "Mrs. Norham, I am deeply — I am profoundly sorry. I am not in the habit of laughing at any serious trouble." But here, raising his eyes to Mrs. Norham's awful face, he felt himself in danger of breaking down again.

"May I ask you," said Mrs. Norham, in whom grief had for the moment given place to indignation, "may I ask you, Mr. Lacy, the reason of this brutal outburst? Is there anything humorous in the death of the young — the gifted? Before you go — and I beg you will go instantly — answer me that!"

"As for my laughter," said Lacy, "it was a mere accident of the nerves. But if you insist on my explaining how it arose, it must have arisen, I suppose, from the thought that whilst three or four months of duty towards our neighbour is enough to make seven hundred cottagers comfortable, altruism in as many years can do nothing but kill one tailor. Read

these reviews. You will then see what I mean. As for me, I now beg leave to say that I am far less sorry for that wretched young man's death than I am for having laughed about it, and having laughed about it in your presence."

"Go," said Mrs. Norham; "go to the Château des Fleurs or the Villa Martin. Tell the merry story there, and you can laugh at it all together. It is with such laughter that houses like the Villa Martin were made to ring!"

CHAPTER XXXII

Mrs. Norham, as soon as she was left alone, took up the reviews, glanced over them, and threw them down like a sting-nettle. "The dastards!" she exclaimed. "The dastards! But it was ever so! It is thus they always murder genius!" In spite, however, of this outburst, she now grew rapidly calmer, and her face came to express calculation rather than agony. She was unable to pretend to herself that she did not know what had happened. She was now overwhelmed by the difficulty of not knowing how to take it; and to this was added the difficulty of breaking the news to Mr. Bousefield.

The latter of these she was compelled to solve immediately, for she saw Mr. Bousefield and his wife coming slowly towards the house across the garden. Mrs. Bousefield looked hardly less sad than she had done when she was sitting on the rocks; but she was making a series of woe-begone efforts to smile; whilst Mr. Bousefield, who had chivalrously possessed himself of her basket, was talking to her with a condescending cheerfulness as though she were a fractious child, whom he would coax into a better humour. Mrs. Norham, judging it best to take her bull by the horns, rushed out to meet them, with a face so appropriate to the occasion that both Mr. and Mrs. Bousefield divined that something was the matter — Mr. Bousefield's thoughts flying off to the Tibbits' Motor, Mrs. Bousefield's to the cook, a break-down of the stove, or the possible exploits of a horrid French cat in the larder. "Oh!" exclaimed Mrs. Norham, "poor Squelch — he has had an accident. He's been knocked down by the train."

Mr. Bousefield experienced an unacknowledged sense of relief, which left him free to be shocked and helpfully self-possessed. "Hurt?" he asked sharply. Mrs. Norham looked

at him, paused, and under her breath said, "Killed." Mr. Bousefield, with a protecting gesture, turned round to his wife. "My dear," he said, "this is very dreadful news. You have not been well this morning. Let me beg you to go in and rest. I must inquire into all the details, and see what practical steps are to be taken." He put his arm within hers. The poor lady convulsively pressed it; and he having thus a certain grip on her, drew her quickly in the direction of the house. Having gone a few yards, however, he very adroitly detached himself, and encouraging her to continue her course by a gentle touch on her shoulder, rejoined Mrs. Norham, with whom he soon was in earnest intercourse. As for Mrs. Bousefield, who, like Lot's wife, looked back, she felt herself turning, as she did so, into a fountain of salt tears, and had one solace only left her — namely, to communicate the news to the household. The three domestics, together with the paying guests, were soon in possession of all that she was able to tell them, and were, by experience, learning the blessed truth that the excitement of a tragedy tends to render its sadness bearable.

Mr. Bousefield, meanwhile, had undertaken to see the authorities, and ascertain what would be done with regard to the burial of the body, begging Mrs. Norham not to attempt to see it till he should be able to accompany her, and support her at such a painful moment. Mrs. Norham, accordingly, being liberated from all thoughts as to what she should do, was confronted by the question of what it was becoming that she should feel. She fortunately recollected that, in her great novel, one of the most tragic and moving incidents had been a death something like the poet's; the agony produced by which in the compassionate heart of the heroine had been admired, quoted, and wept over by the earnest women of Bloomsbury. Hurrying, therefore, to her bedroom, she referred to her own pages. She perused them with rapt attention; she blistered them, as she felt herself bound to do, with a great passion of tears; and feeling that her mind had now been pitched in a right key, she wandered out alone to the tract outside the garden, with the road on one side and the pebbles of the beach on the other, bearing her grief with her — so she

beautifully told herself — like a mother who had wandered out, bearing her own dead baby.

As for Lacy, he dismissed the matter with the thought that, "If anybody in this neighbourhood had to make way with himself, nobody could be better spared than this vain and miserable creature;" and his thoughts forthwith returned to his own concerns. When he looked, however, at his watch, in order to see how soon he might reasonably expect his uncle's return from driving, he found he had still a good hour to spare, before it would be any use for him to be walking towards the Villa Martin. Accordingly, for want of anything else to do, he turned his steps in the direction of his own dwelling, and began, as he went, to glance at the tailor's poems. They were, indeed, pitiable performances — confused reverberations of writers such as Walt Whitman, with only one original idea in the whole of them. This was the writer's idea of the magnitude of his own genius, which seemed to inflate his verbiage, like a bubble blown in mud. "How infinitely happier," thought Lacy, "would this poor fellow have been had he never seen — had he never been able to read — a book!" He was by this time in his own library; and he extracted his cheque-book from a drawer. He wrote a cheque, with a short note to acccompany it, and placing this in an envelope, directed it, and rang the bell. "Let this be taken," he said, when a servant entered, "to Mrs. Prouse Bousefield, in St. Antoine."

The contents of his note were these:—

"Dear Mrs. Bousefield,— Though this death of one of your household must, of course, be a considerable shock to you, you, no more than I do, will feel it as a personal loss. But I have just remembered hearing that this poor wretch had a mother — an old washerwoman; and if our gentleman's love of Humanity extended as far as his mother, he may — it is just possible — have contributed something to her support; and his death may be an appreciable loss to her. Do find out; and in case this should be so, I enclose a cheque for £10 towards a fund for assisting her. If there is no occasion for the money, you can tear the cheque up."

Lacy, when this was despatched, consulted his watch again. He at once left the house and set off for the Villa Martin. Lord Runcorn, he heard, on reaching it, was out driving still; but Lady Cornelia, who had been to St. Antoine in her pony-carriage, had been back for twenty minutes. The butler, who knew Lacy well, imparted this piece of gossip as he took him across the hall to one of the smaller sitting-rooms. It was a room that had been appropriated to Lady Cornelia's own use; and Lacy fancied, as he was taken there, that he should find his aunt alone. He was surprised, therefore, on entering, to discover another lady with her — a lady not staying in the house, for she was cloaked and veiled and bonneted. Lady Cornelia, moreover, who, whenever she could patronise, was effusive, was standing with an arm around her waist, in the act of bidding good-bye to her. "Dear Lady Cornelia," the visitor's voice was saying, "good-bye — good-bye — good-bye. I shall never forget your sympathy shown me at this awful moment!" — and the speaker advanced her face towards her friend's at the peculiar angle which shows the expectation of a kiss and would render its refusal a brutality. The kiss was given; and Lacy, with some amazement, realised that its recipient was none other than Mrs. Norham. Mrs. Norham, however, had been so occupied with the agony of her grief, and the sweetness of Lady Cornelia's sympathy, that although she was conscious of the entrance of some stranger, she departed without having noticed who the stranger was.

"My dear Tristram," said Lady Cornelia, when she and her nephew were alone, "just move that jar of narcissus to the table over there by the piano. I don't like strong scents so near me. Thank you. Now sit down. Do you know," she went on, gathering up her embroidery, and comparing two skeins of silk before threading her needle, "that poor thing who's just gone out has had such a dreadful shock. One of those people she has had living with her has been run over by the train. I'm afraid there's no doubt that he killed himself; and I found little Mrs. Norham wandering alone along the road, sobbing and half distracted. I made her get into the pony-carriage and tell me all the story. Then I brought her

back here, and gave her some warm tea, and I think she made herself better by having a good cry. Tell me — do — for your eyes are better than mine — which of these two pink silks is the darkest. And now, what did you think of your expedition to Monte Carlo? I think it's a dreadful place. It was always a bad place, and now it's a vulgar place as well. Listen — that's your uncle's voice. There'll be more tea in the drawing-room for him. Let us go in there; and you shall have some also."

In the drawing-room they found the tea-table already spread, with nothing wanting but the tea and the hot tea-cake: and there, too, was Mrs. Tilney, bright and alert as usual.

"My dear Cornelia," she exclaimed, "when first the door opened, I expected to see Mrs. Helbeckstein. She's coming up here sometime. She announced that she was going to do so, to tell us about Lady Dovedale. Depend upon it, now she's once been inside the house, you'll never again be able to keep her out of it."

Another door opened as she spoke, and admitted, not Mrs. Helbeckstein, but Lord Runcorn and Mrs. Mordaunt, fresh from their long drive. A little bubbling effervescence of laughter and conversation ensued; till Lady Cornelia, with a delicate pathos in her voice, which seemed to remove the event to a decent distance, mentioned the tragedy of which she had just been hearing. The voices of the company went at once in half mourning, which they continued to wear till the teapot and a dish of tea-cake afforded an excuse for a change of tone and topics, and the tailor and Mrs. Norham were dismissed, like tea-things being sent away.

Lacy now, as soon as his uncle's ears were left disengaged by Mrs. Mordaunt, who had been dissuading him from eating tea-cake, found an opportunity of asking him for a moment's conversation on business. Lord Runcorn at once rose and drew his nephew into the library.

"Here," he said, "is a cigar which I'm quite sure you will appreciate."

As soon as he was alone with his uncle, Lacy briefly explained his readiness to re-enter Parliament, and also the grave uncertainty in which his affairs had so suddenly become

involved. He then wound up by saying, "You have on former occasions offered, with great kindness, to pay my election expenses. Supposing I find myself stripped of the money that has lately come to me, will you pay them for me now if I settle to stand at Manchester?"

Lord Runcorn took his cigar from his mouth, lazily blowing out the smoke, and fixed his nephew, meanwhile, with the gaze of his hollow eyes. Then he laid on his arm a long, delicate hand.

"My dear boy," he said in a cavernous whisper, "of course I will — of course. We will take that for settled. And now tell me more about this mysterious claimant. The whole thing, we will hope, is a mere flash in the pan; but I must say this — you take your possible loss like a true stoic philosopher."

The uncle and nephew were still engrossed in their conversation, when the door was opened, with apologetic gentleness, and Lady Cornelia appeared, saying: —

"I am sorry to interrupt you; but before Tristram goes, will he come into the drawing-room. Mrs. Helbeckstein is here, and she has an important message for him."

Mrs. Helbeckstein's condition of mind was, in some respects, like Mrs. Norham's. Her life, too, had been visited with a touch of tragedy; and for her, too, the tragedy had brought with it its consolations. Lady Dovedale's indisposition had become suddenly more pronounced, and Mrs. Helbeckstein, with the far-seeing wisdom that was characteristic of her, had found herself confronted by three possible inconveniences. One was that Lady Dovedale might die in her house; another was that she might be laid up there, with some lingering illness; the third was that her illness, whether lingering or not, might be infectious. Any one of these contingencies would be injurious to Mrs. Helbeckstein's social campaign — the last of the three might be even dangerous to herself; and yet, after seriously weighing the matter, she decided that Lady Dovedale's position was sufficient to give considerable importance to the friend in whose house the newspapers should mention her as suffering, or as breathing

her last. One thing only she could not put up with — namely, infection; she had therefore already begun to devise means by which Lady Dovedale, if necessary, might be got rid of in good time. She had decided that the best thing to do would be to hand her over to Lady Madeleine; and hearing that Lacy was, at that moment, in the Villa Martin, she was determined, through him, to communicate to her a preliminary alarm.

"Of course," she said to Lacy, when he appeared in response to her message, "there may be nothing really the matter with her, but I don't like that cough; and I'm terribly afraid that our villa here, being so near the sea, mayn't suit her. I should be so glad," she continued, looking round her for sympathy, "if Lady Madeleine would come over to-morrow morning and see her. I am never nervous for myself — never; but for my friends," she said, holding up a gloved hand, and shaking it as if to exemplify her involuntary tremors, "I am all so — I am, for all the world, like dat."

Lacy promised to convey her message to Lady Madeleine, suggesting that he and she should walk over to St. Hilaire that evening; but Mrs. Helbeckstein would not hear of this, as she was expecting Sir John and Lady Scarva to dinner, and was unwilling to disfigure her party by anything so unbecoming as anxiety. "Let her come in the morning," she said; "dat will be more natural."

That evening, when Lacy returned to the château, the first object that greeted his eyes in the hall was a telegram lying on the table. It was from his lawyers, in answer to his own; and its contents were as follows: "C. & J. W. Fox, name of firm of solicitors, Suffolk Street. Ealing private address of Davis, one of partners, cousin or brother of Samuel Davis, bill-discounter."

This gave Lacy a good deal to think about. The sudden appearance on the scene of the family of Mr. Samuel Davis naturally recalled to him a certain curly-headed friend of his own, and began to throw a gleam of light in his mind on the first letter he had received, though it did nothing to explain the others. His mind, perhaps, would have become some-

what clearer could he have read a letter received that day by a gentleman who had recently won several hundred pounds at baccarat, and was now living at Nice in very comfortable quarters. The letter in question was as follows: —

"My dear old George B., — It was lucky that Sam had to see me in London. T. L. hasn't even answered our letter — the one I wrote as I said I would. It must, however, have given him a *mauvais quart d'heure*. The only pity is we were not there to see it. What fun it would have been watching his jaw drop! But the long and short of it is, the details of your brother's death are too well known; so that cock won't fight quite as well as we hoped it would. I must tell you also, old boy, that we might very easily have got ourselves into a hell of a mess over the matter. But, by Jove, as things have turned out, the game was worth the candle; for I've hit upon something by the most lucky accident — something that will make T. L. sit up, and no mistake — a something, old boy, that is genuine business too.

"As to that first letter, about you and your brother, I made — I'm sure you won't mind — a clean breast of the matter to Sam, and told him that the whole thing was a harmless little joke of yours, for all the world like dressing up as a ghost; and that I joined in with you to get a rise out of T. L. Well, Sam at first blew me up sky high, and did, what I'll bet you he never did before — dropped one of his half-crown cigars into his tumbler of whisky and soda. What really made him angry was my having written that preliminary little letter of ours on a sheet of notepaper belonging to John Davis, at Ealing. However, all's well that ends well; and as soon as Sam had calmed down, what do you think happened? Guess! But you'll never guess right. I'll tell you. Sam scratched his head, sank back in his chair, lit another cigar — and I sat counting his rings. At last he said — you know how damned familiar such beasts as Sam are — he said, 'Look here, young shaver, though you've nearly made as confounded a fool of yourself as any of the young gentlemen who come to borrow money of me, I shouldn't be surprised, after what you have

just told me, if we shouldn't find out for old Brandon some next-of-kin after all. I know something or other about old Brandon's family, and I think — well — look you, I'll see my brother to-morrow. Let me have a copy of that nonsense you were mad enough to write on his notepaper, and he and I will write something that will take out the taste of it.' I shall see Sam again to-morrow. This happened some days ago. He has evidently something in his eye. But you and I, mind you, must be as mum as a couple of dormice. Discretion, in Sam's estimation, has sometimes a market value. Will write again. — Yours ever, P."

As Lacy, however, was not privileged to see this interesting document, it naturally had no effect, either disquieting or otherwise, on his feelings; and as he had already prepared his mind for the worst, certain incidents which took place the following day made him forget for the time his personal circumstances altogether.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE first of the incidents referred to originated with Mrs. St. Germans, who recurred at breakfast to a subject which had been broached by her some days ago. This subject was the return of herself and her granddaughter to St. Laurent, and, as a matter of course, of Lady Madeleine also.

The second originated with Lady Madeleine herself, when she began to examine her letters, and to communicate the contents of them to her friends. The first she opened was from her mother; and in it, Lady Dovedale declared that her illness had been much exaggerated. "In fact," she said, "it is so trifling that I won't even see a doctor. All the same, my dear child, if you will look in in the morning, I shall be delighted to have a little chat with you; but I've no notion of being told by Mrs. Helbeckstein how to manage my own health."

This was reassuring enough, and Lady Madeleine was congratulated on the news, but when she turned to another letter, which dealt with the same subject, its contents were found to be of a very different character. It was a letter from Lady Tregothran; and though she subsequently showed it to Lacy, she now merely mentioned the parts of it that related to Lady Dovedale. It was dated from Nice, and ran thus: —

"MY DEAREST MADELEINE, — I think it only right to tell you that I have reason to fear that your mother is more seriously ill than she thinks she is. Sir James Mabberly — her doctor and mine — has just arrived at Nice, and is staying at this hotel. He is an intimate acquaintance of mine, and I mentioned your mother's attack. He is the most discreet of doctors; but having lately seen your mother in London, the little he said to me was quite enough to make it clear that the

best thing she could do would be to see him again here. He evidently believes that, in spite of her apparent strength, a very little thing might — I don't know what — I'll leave you to finish the sentence. Get her to be careful — not to exert herself. But I need not instruct you; you will be sure to do the right thing. And now, my dear, one word more about a quite different matter. I come back to-morrow to St. Hilaire; and I want you to spend a whole morning or afternoon with me, to help me about a bit of work which I can discuss with nobody except yourself. So keep yourself at the disposition of your affectionate friend, NITA."

"Do you think," said Lacy, "of going to St. Hilaire this morning? If so, I will come with you."

She assented, and they went together. She handed to him, on the way, Lady Tregothran's letter. "I did not know," he said, "that you and she were so intimate."

"We were good friends," she replied, "when we were girls together; and on some of the chance occasions when we meet now, her eternal friendship suddenly comes to life again."

Lady Madeleine's visit to her mother lasted so short a time, that when Lacy, who waited for her in the little esplanade of St. Hilaire, saw her emerging from Mrs. Helbeckstein's portals, he took it for granted that the invalid was much better. But the moment she spoke to him his first impression was dispelled.

"I am afraid," she said, "that Nita Tregothran was right. Come with me to the telegraph-office, and I'll tell you everything by the way. There's a local doctor — I don't know where he comes from — but Mrs. Helbeckstein has produced him for the occasion from somewhere. He and she were in deep consultation when I arrived. To speak the plain truth, I've no doubt in my mind that Mrs. Helbeckstein's wishes are father to the doctor's thoughts; but at any rate the doctor declares that Mrs. Helbeckstein's villa is the very worst place in the world for a person in my mother's condition. That means that Mrs. Helbeckstein wants to get rid of her, before she is too far gone to be moved. Now, there's a reason for

this; and I don't think the reason is imaginary. They believe my mother is going to be laid up with something — I don't know what — possibly scarlatina, or measles. Mrs. Helbeckstein otherwise wouldn't be so anxious to be quit of her. Well — I'm going at once to telegraph to Sir James Mabberly. I shall beg him to come over here this afternoon, and call on my mother, as if he were a chance visitor. I suppose I may ask him to meet me at the château — mayn't I? What — this is the office? The message won't take a moment."

"I've been thinking," said Lacy, as they turned to walk back together, "what, if she really has to be moved, would be the best place to take her to. Bring her to the château, and you stay on to look after her."

His companion turned and looked at him. Of late he had been coming to realise, whenever her eyes met his, that he was in the presence of that magnetic mystery which is for certain women at once their charm and their fate, and which is, perhaps, best described by saying that it agitates their prayers and pervades with its secret the atmosphere of dim confessionals. He had taken to noticing also small details of her aspect and her movements, and now, he could not tell why, her lips impressed themselves on his memory, and he found himself wondering for a moment by what men they had been kissed. There was a noble refinement in them; and yet there was that sadness which some lips never lose when they have eaten of the tree of knowledge.

"You think of everything," she said. "I do not know how to thank you. You are the most unselfish man I know. I have known many selfish ones. Let us wait and see what Sir James Mabberly says."

The distinguished physician came. Lady Dovedale, though restive in the matter of seeing a doctor, had no objection to receiving Sir James as a visitor; and events conspired to make her not only willing but pleased to give him the opportunity he desired of discussing her symptoms with her in private. Sir James was the keeper of the health of so many Royal personages, that Mrs. Helbeckstein received him with extreme civility. She indeed seemed inclined to regard his visit as a

compliment to herself. Accordingly, Lady Dovedale, who had, during the past fortnight, been arriving at the opinion that she wanted to be taken down a little, saw an opportunity which her womanhood would not suffer her to miss, when her hostess was engrossing the caller with her best fashionable conversation.

"Sir James," she said to him from her sofa, speaking with her accustomed *brusquerie*, "I've got a little matter about which I should like to talk to you, if you wouldn't mind coming with me into the next room for a moment. You'll have to give me your arm."

She had the satisfaction of seeing how her word of power nipped one of Mrs. Helbeckstein's finest anecdotes in the bud, and brought Sir James to her side, all attention and deference. Mrs. Helbeckstein watched the two as they slowly left the room, her heart divided between resentment at Lady Dovedale's rudeness and admiration of it, and both emotions complicated by a growing doubt as to whether she would profit most by keeping, or getting rid of her. Lady Dovedale meanwhile, without waiting to be catechised, exclaimed, as soon as the door had closed upon them, "My dear Sir James, I'm really delighted to see you. I'm delighted to do that always — I mean as a personal friend — as you know, who so very often have dined with us. But I'm delighted at this moment for another — a very selfish reason. All these good people here are trying to turn me into an interesting invalid — a victim to — I don't really know what horror they've invented for me. Now, you be a good man, and just have a look at me; and, before you go, take Mrs. Helbeckstein down, by giving me a sensible, clean bill of health. It's true, the other day — I may as well tell you that — I had a little attack of coughing; but that was because I went on that yacht of theirs to Monte Carlo with them. What they ever want a yacht for here, except to show that they've got one, it passes my wit to tell. I oughtn't to have gone — that's the long and short of it. However, that's over; but Mrs. Helbeckstein, unfortunately, saw a little spot of red on my handkerchief, and made up her mind that I should be dead in her best cabin before

she'd finished her adventures at *trente et quarante*. And now, no sooner does my cough go away completely than, just because for a day or two I'm not quite up to the mark, she talks to me, and fusses about me, as if she thought I was going to have the plague; and is begging me to send for some doctor — or I think it must be half a dozen doctors — from Cannes. And all the while, as you can see, there is nothing the matter with me at all. The real thing is that I have not been sleeping very well lately, and, not unnaturally, I'm rather tired during the day, and a bit headachey. Just look at my face. I haven't had a better colour for years."

"Let me look," said Sir James, blandly. "Turn a *leetle* bit towards the window, please. Yes — yes — I hadn't noticed that. You've certainly more colour than you have had for some years past."

"And then," said Lady Dovedale, "as for pains, I tell you I've positively none."

"To be sure," said Sir James. "I can perfectly well believe you; and I daresay if you have a little headache now and then, this only troubles you in the evening, when I daresay you're a little feverish. This would be quite natural — only what I should expect."

"Exactly," said Lady Dovedale. "I always said you were a wonderful man. It's only in the evening I feel in the least feverish. It will all pass off in a day or two. Well, now, you've put me through my facings. I consider you a real good friend; and there's one thing more which I want you to do immediately. Leave me here, and say I'm writing a letter; and tell Mrs. Helbeckstein, civilly, what a goose she's been making of herself. If you're staying on at St. Hilaire, do come and see me again; or I'll tell Mrs. Helbeckstein to ask you to dinner or luncheon."

"I'm afraid," said Sir James, "I'm going to Nice this evening. But I'll go back to Mrs. Helbeckstein, and I'll do you the fullest justice."

When Sir James returned to the room in which Mrs. Helbeckstein was still expecting him, beguiling the time by watching two huge English footmen put wood on the fire, and arrange

an elaborate tea-table, the expression of his face was not by any means the same as it had been a moment ago in the presence of his sanguine patient.

"Lady Dovedale," he began, "is writing some letters, and has sent me back again by myself."

Mrs. Helbeckstein looked to see that the door was closed. "Come here, Sir James," she cried. "Come here and have some tea. Now, tell me — Lady Dovedale — don't you tink her looking very ill? She *is* ill? She is going to have something or other dat is bad — eh?"

"That," said Sir James, in precise and deliberate accents, "is more than I can say with certainty; but I feel bound to tell you, both in her interest, and your own, that her indisposition is, in all probability, the beginning of typhoid fever. The attack may be very slight. There would be no cause for alarm if it were not for the fact of her lungs being — well — not all we could wish them. In a few days' time she will have left her sofa for her bed; and the great thing is to protect her from draughts and chills."

"Could anything," exclaimed Mrs. Helbeckstein, "be more unlucky than dat! Why, dis house is full of draughts. It is positively a temple of de winds. Don't you tink we should find her a lodging in some more sheltered spot? I assure you, except Mr. Helbeckstein's room and mine, dere's not a room in de house fit for an invalid to occupy. Her daughter, who was here dis morning, could easily find some place for her."

"My dear madam," said Sir James, "I may be mistaken about Lady Dovedale's condition. To-morrow, or next day, will show whether I am or no; but my own opinion — I am not speaking professionally — would be that she would run more risks by being removed from your house than by remaining in it. As I shall not be here, however, to back my opinion, I must ask you to take it for what it is worth; and I would strongly advise your sending for some physician from Cannes. If he comes to-morrow, he will probably be able to speak without hesitation. Considering that there is still some doubt about the matter, I have not told Lady Dovedale my opinion

— my strong suspicions. But if my suspicions are verified, the truth should be at once made known to her."

"And now tell me frankly," said Mrs. Helbeckstein, "is dere any danger of infection, supposing that this is typhoid? We have here so many friends coming constantly to de house; and should we have with us a case of infectious illness, I should tink it wrong — positively and horribly wrong — to let them continue coming, without giving full warning to them."

"Certainly," said Sir James, "had I a typhoid patient in my own house, I should, for several reasons, refrain from entertaining society."

CHAPTER XXXIV

The following day the anticipations of Sir James were verified. By half-past nine in the morning, with a most mysterious promptitude, one of the best-known doctors at Cannes presented himself at Mrs. Helbeckstein's villa, and pronounced that her dear friend's symptoms were undoubtedly those of typhoid. Mrs. Helbeckstein had been already apprised of Lacy's opportune offer to receive the invalid under his own roof during her illness, and had welcomed it with a heart-felt satisfaction which it would be almost impossible to exaggerate. The Château des Fleurs was the very house for a hospital. Lady Dovedale would there be free from the coming and going of visitors. She would not be disturbed by them, and she would not drive them away. With eager solicitude Mrs. Helbeckstein argued that her removal, since it was unfortunately necessary, should take place as soon as possible. She had, indeed, overnight, with truly admirable forethought, made every arrangement that could hasten it and obviate its contingent difficulties. She had not only telegraphed, on her own account, for the doctor; but she had sent to Cannes a discreet and confidential servant, with *carte blanche* as to payment, to secure and to bring back with him two unimpeachable nurses, who were to be kept in a lodging close by, on the chance of their services being necessary. The doctor, accordingly, had no sooner given his verdict, than two notes were despatched to the Château des Fleurs, one to Lady Madeleine, the other to Mr. Tristram Lacy, in which Mrs. Helbeckstein announced that, acting under the doctor's orders, she would accept Mr. Lacy's offer, with she could not say how much gratitude, and would send Lady Dovedale to the château in the course of a few hours. "I have secured," she said,

"the best landau in the place, and by the best of good luck have secured two nurses also. They are here now in St. Hilaire. There is no obligation to keep them if they do not prove satisfactory; but I hear they are first-rate women, quite up to their work. Dear Lady Madeleine," Mrs. Helbeckstein went on, "I hope you will not think I have presumed. But I have engaged them for a week, on my own account, and at my own expense, as the last little hospitality I can pay to your dear mother, whom we had hoped to have had with us till we all went back to England. All my parties without her will quite have their life gone out of them."

This sudden development of events did not end with itself. It had the effect of accelerating the departure of Mrs. St. Germans and her granddaughter, who left the château on the morning which followed the invalid's arrival. On that morning Lady Dovedale took to, or rather kept to, her bed; but the evening before, in spite of her increasing weakness, she lay on a sofa, and still retained spirit enough to say to her daughter, as her eyes travelled round the room, "What a comfort it is to be in a gentleman's house once more!"

And now, with the departure of the St. Germans, there began a new life at the château, inaugurated by the luncheon at which, with no other companions, Lacy and Lady Madeleine met and discussed Lady Dovedale's symptoms.

"I think," said Lady Madeleine, "that her cough is a little worse; but anything was better for her than to remain on with the Helbecksteins. Of course, she's weaker and more languid than she was. That, the doctor tells me, is part of the course of the fever. But the nurse who is with her now says she is going on most satisfactorily. She's half asleep now, and my being there irritates her, because she thinks it shows I consider her case serious. I'm going off presently to see Nita Tregothran, who was to come back this afternoon. You remember she told me, in her letter, that she wanted my help about something."

Had nothing taken place to prevent him, Lacy would have offered to go with her; but this new chapter of life had already been marked by an incident which would take him, that

afternoon, in quite another direction. Just before luncheon he had been the recipient of a telegram which caused him to exclaim when he read it, "And so she knows my address! I concluded she knew my name. But why, then, make all this mystery? And yet," he continued, as he looked at the message once again, "she may not have known the address when the letter was sent off." The message in question was this: "A letter awaits you at St. Antoine, addressed L., Poste Restante. Inquire at once for it, if you have not yet done so. Clairvoyante."

To St. Antoine he accordingly betook himself as soon as the meal was over; and there, at the post-office, the mysterious letter was delivered to him. The contents, which he at once inspected, were written in a disguised hand. If not entirely lucid, they had the merit of brevity. They bore no address except "Nice," and consisted of these few lines: —

"Had I been able to meet you again, I might give you further news; but my art enables me to predict that whatever I might have been able to tell you you will, in the course of a week or ten days, at farthest, hear with more authority from a quite unexpected quarter. The worst you can hear will be certainly much better than the worst you dread. It may possibly, if you choose to make it so, be better than at present you can imagine. When events explain my meaning, think of your veiled CLAIRVOYANTE."

This letter left Lacy even more bewildered than before; but it had the effect of slightly raising his spirits. It at all events relieved him for the time of a not unnatural tendency to brood, when he was alone, over his own financial future. Indeed, it so far restored him to himself as to suggest a visit to Mrs. Bousefield, from whom, to his surprise, he had had no acknowledgment of his cheque, and of whom he proposed to inquire, rather than of her husband or Mrs. Norham, whether anything could be done for the mother of the deceased genius.

But when he reached the door of the altruists, and, inquiring if Mrs. Bousefield was in, was admitted, with a doubtful

stare, by the somewhat slatternly maid, he had a vague sense that something had taken place — that the Holy Church of Humanity had experienced some change or other beyond what could be accounted for by the loss of its first singer. And such had indeed been the case. It was but the day before yesterday that the poet of self-forgetfulness had precipitately taken leave of a world in which the newspaper critics were so unworthy of him; it was but the day before yesterday that this particular news had been received by Lacy in a manner so infelicitous; yet the sacred temples of love had, during that brief time, been not only shadowed by sorrow, but had actually been torn by schism; and the sacred agonies which Mrs. Norham voluntarily courted had been supplemented by others which were not by any means so sustaining.

The priestess of altruism, the defier of rank and fashion, had no sooner left the embraces of her friend Lady Cornelia than she had risen to emotional altitudes higher and more satisfactory than any she remembered ever to have reached before. In this condition of mind, despite Mr. Bousefield's protest, she had determined to see alone the mutilated body of one whom she described to herself as Startfield Hall's first martyr; and entering the room in which the remains were lying, she indulged in a vigil of two hours' duration, during which she muttered and felt enough beautiful and torturing things to make the fortune of a new altruistic novel — part of which, indeed, she composed unconsciously on the spot. "Oh the pity of it!" she exclaimed. "Oh for the great, baffling, seemingly aimless waste of all that is most sublimely struggling in this our common manhood! Oh for those rare souls who alone feel all the tragedy of it!"

All this was satisfactory as far as it went; and a greater satisfaction awaited her upstairs in her bedroom, where she found that the reflection of her own face in the glass, with all the woe of womanhood swimming in her tear-dimmed eyes, was a more inspiring object than even the *disjecta membra* of her poet. But when next morning she came down, ready to attend the funeral, feeling that she alone could appreciate its full sadness, and looking as though she were a widow and a

bereaved mother in one, she was irritated at finding the face of Mrs. Prouse Bousefield looking not only as sad, but almost as solemn, as her own. The sadness Mrs. Norham was accustomed to, and had long explained it to herself as temper; but what right had Mrs. Bousefield to that look of moving solemnity? That was bad; but matters became worse still when Mrs. Bousefield mentioned the letter she had had from Lacy, and the money enclosed in it for the help of Mr. Squelch's mother. Mrs. Norham's sorrow for a moment was almost forgotten in displeasure.

"As the cheque," she said, "seems intended for a fund, in case we should raise one, I daresay Mrs. Bousefield will commit it to my keeping."

"Certainly — certainly," said Mr. Bousefield, gravely frowning.

Mrs. Bousefield, with a helpless hand, passed the cheque over to Mrs. Norham. Mrs. Norham, with frigid calm, passed it over to Mr. Bousefield. "Send it back to him, will you," she said, "with our compliments. We are capable of bearing the responsibilities of our own dead. Intruding his money on us at this moment was in the worst taste, to say the least of it. Mrs. Bousefield," she continued, "you will excuse Mr. Bousefield and me. He and I must start now for the burying-ground."

Mrs. Bousefield, with a sudden movement, applied her handkerchief to her eyes. "I've quite done breakfast myself," she said in a quick, half-audible whisper, and starting from her seat she hastily left the room. Her breakfast had been merely one bite at the apex of a triangle of toast.

In her bedroom was a small writing-table; and on the writing-table was a blotting-book bound in Stuart tartan, and ornamented on the back with a vignette of the Wallace Memorial at Stirling. Opening this, she wrote the following letter: —

"My dearest Husband, — We are all in the Lord's hands, and we none of us quite know what may happen to us. I have been thinking this lately more often than usual; so I have

been led to do the first important thing which, ever since our wedding-day, I have done without telling you. You know the ten thousand pounds that came to me five years back from the Maclarens. I was not rightly sure what would happen about it if I went; so I got my cousin in Edinburgh to draw me out a new will, in order to make sure that everything should go to you. I sent it back to him, properly signed and witnessed, yesterday forenoon. I am happier, now I have done this, and have told my dearest husband, over whose welfare I pray that the Lord may ever watch better than any feeble human vessel which is liable to shipwreck. I had best say no more, except that I am your loving wife,

"Elizabeth Prouse Bousefield.

"*P.S.* — Will you think unkindly of me if I just say one thing more? I would not, if I were you, put any more money into that Motor. I'm sure it's a foolish business, and never can come to good."

Mrs. Bousefield, having finished her letter and sealed it up in its envelope, inquired of the French domestic, whom she usually described as "the table-maid," if Mr. Bousefield had gone out; and hearing that he had done so a few minutes ago, she confided the letter to the girl, enjoining her to give it to Mr. Bousefield if he should come home earlier than herself.

"It's to tell him," Mrs. Bousefield explained, "that I may be kept out later than usual."

Mr. Bousefield and Mrs. Norham were meanwhile proceeding in a cab to the scene of the poet's funeral, Mrs. Norham on her coal-black knees carrying a dark green something, at which Mr. Bousefield looked askance, not daring to ask what it was, and discovered to be a crown of bay leaves. Some of the paying-guests, moreover, had also set forth on foot; though their grief for their lost brother was modified by some want of respect for him, and also by some thoughts of a bicycle-ride which they were to start on as soon as the ceremony was over.

The ceremony proved to be of the very scantiest kind; for, beyond the mere act of standing and watching the coffin

lowered, it consisted in Mrs. Norham's raising her two black arms, casting her crown on the coffin-lid, and ejaculating something which began with "Good-bye, my brother."

The moment Mrs. Norham was out of breath the paying-guests departed, alternately discussing the expedition on which they were at once to start, and denouncing the system of privilege, capitalism, and competition which had driven their gifted, if unpopular, brother to his fate. Mrs. Norham, however, still lingered by the grave; and Mr. Bousefield was exhibiting an inclination to linger by Mrs. Norham, when she turned to him with rigid features, and waved him imperiously away. "Go away, do, and leave me," she said; "I must be alone for a little. I'll walk home by myself." Mr. Bousefield unwillingly turned his back and went; and Mrs. Norham remained, with the words, "Oh the pity of it," on her lips in order to refresh herself with one more draught of agony.

Mr. Bousefield's sorrow was not perhaps greater than Mrs. Norham's, but it was more like the vulgar feeling which common people know by this name. Mr. Squelch's merits as a poet he accepted on Mrs. Norham's authority; but the fact that Mr. Squelch had not recognised revealed truth saddened him more than the fact that the world had not recognised Mr. Squelch: and he went slowly homewards, with his wide-awake pulled over his eyes, chewing his under lip, and meditatively slashing with his walking-stick any weeds that were growing beside his path. When he reached the level crossing near the station, he came to an involuntary standstill. From thence, at a distance of not more than forty yards, the spot was visible at which the poet's career had ended. The line there ran through a cutting with sloping banks, and these were tufted with heather and bog-myrtle. The spot irresistibly attracted Mr. Bousefield's eyes. He was prepared, as his attention became fixed on it, for a painful increase of his melancholy; but he was not prepared for the prickly chill of horror which diffused itself suddenly over his limbs, and made him feel as if he were turning into an icicle. For on the heathery bank, just where the poet must have been seated, he saw something more than heather — a sinister, black some-

thing — a crouching something which had the semblance of a human form, and seemed to his appalled imagination like the very demon of suicide. With a desperate effort, which did him considerable credit, he shook off this first access of unreasonable and unnerving terror, and without asking himself why he did so, he hastened towards the spot. But midway in his course he again came to a standstill. The black crouching object was no longer a mystery. It was an object very familiar to him. It was his wife.

Her face, strained and changed, though so familiar, was resting heavily on her hands; and her eyes, as though she were hypnotised, were fixed immovably on the rails. A slight cry escaped him. He began to run wildly forward. Mrs. Bousefield heard nothing until he was quite close to her. She started, looked round, and gave an odd wavering scream. The sound had not ceased when her husband had thrown himself by her side; and, after many long months, during which such demonstrations had ceased, he once more had thrown his arms about her, and had drawn her closely to himself. "My wife, my dearest wife," he exclaimed, "for God's sake come away — come away from this ghastly place." For answer, his wife's head sank limply upon his shoulder; then her lips shook with a little whimpering laugh, and this ended in a series of muffled sobs, as her face sought to hide itself in the folds of his marital coat. Mr. Bousefield said nothing until this paroxysm had exhausted itself, and judiciously rested content with the sustained eloquence of his arm. At length, with an abrupt movement, like that of a sleeper waking herself, Mrs. Bousefield sat upright, and looked with a timid smile at her husband.

"I'd just a foolish fancy," she said, in a tone of timorous explanation. "I thought I'd like to see the place where the poor lad met his death. He was a sullen-tempered lad, and conceited. Never did I see the likes of him; but I'm sorry he came to so bad an end as this. It was just that nonsense they puffed him up with that worried him into his grave. All the same, this has made me feel quite queer. I'm better now; and yet still I'm a little weak like. Do you think, Mr. Prouse Bousefield, ye'd be good enough to help me home?"

All Mr. Bousefield's natural kindliness was aroused; and with a gesture which, if it hardly resembled that of an impassioned Romeo, had all the tenderness of a father bending over a wounded child, he lifted his wife up. He drew her arm within his and with slow steps they began walking homewards. Their progress was satisfactory till they reached the sandy tract on which the door of the garden of the villa opened; and then Mrs. Bousefield showed symptoms of such exhaustion that her husband could but just support her until they were in their own domain, where he placed her in a wicker chair under one of the stunted pine trees, and hurried into the house himself to get her a glass of brandy. He shouted for the maid, with a vehemence quite unusual with him. She hurriedly made her appearance, with Mrs. Bousefield's letter to him in her hand, and left him to beguile the time with it, whilst she went to fetch the brandy bottle and a wine-glass. He had no sooner read it than he let it fall to the ground. With an effort he braced himself to stoop and pick it up; and as soon as the brandy was brought, he, somewhat to the maid's surprise, swallowed a glass himself, preparatory to taking it to his wife.

As he was in the act of going back to her he saw another letter on a table — a letter directed to himself, which had just arrived from England. He snatched this up, and hurried across the sandy grass. Kneeling by his wife's side, he applied the glass to her lips. Her eyes were closed; but his voice and his touch roused her. She swallowed a little brandy; sat up, and, looking at him with a reviving smile, said, "Thank ye, Mr. Prouse Bousefield. I will soon be feeling better now. Ye won't go away just yet, will you?" He drew a chair close to her, sat down by her, and patted her hand. "Keep quite quiet, my dear," he said. "I'll stay here and read my letter. This afternoon I'll take you out for a drive."

This enchanting and unexpected promise did her even more good than the brandy. She sank back in the chair, looking happy, though still faint. Mr. Bousefield, whose heart was weak and was still throbbing painfully, did not dare to look steadily in the face the events which had just happened. He

could not have been more upset had he been capsised in an omnibus. He turned, therefore, with a feeling of relief to his hitherto unopened letter. Anything, he felt, would relieve him that in any way would distract his thoughts; and if he hoped for distraction, he was certainly not disappointed.

He opened his letter. Having read a few words he frowned. Then he put on his spectacles. Then he bit his lip, and sharply changed his attitude. Then he drew in his breath as if he had pricked his finger. Having read the letter through once, he began to pore over it again. At the top of the paper was an elaborately engraved address — "Tibbits' Auxiliary Auto-Electric Motor Company, 480 Queen Victoria Street; Works, South Lambert Road, S.W.; Telephone Number, 0028; Telegraphic Address, *Revolution*."

Mr. Bousefield was still sitting with this document on his knee, when the garden door was abruptly pushed open, and Mrs. Norham, who had had enough by this time of altruistic agony, entered. At the sight of the group before her the prophetess gave a start, and all the agony which had just been dismissed from her face came back again in the form of perplexed displeasure. "What could it mean?" she asked herself, "this unusual outburst of philandering?" And she strode towards the husband and wife like a kind of moral policeman, as if she would take them into custody, or order them to move on.

"Is Mrs. Bousefield not well?" she asked in frigid accents, scanning Mr. Bousefield's left hand, which was resting protectingly on one of the unaltruistic hands of his wife. "In that case you should take her to her bedroom, out of this hot sun."

"Hush!" said Mr. Bousefield; "she's asleep." And his voice, though it was but a whisper, had a tone of command which Mrs. Norham had never heard in it before. She could hardly believe her ears, and only a moment later she had a difficulty in believing her eyes. Mr. Bousefield, using great caution, bent over his wife's chair and kissed her hand, having gently removed his own from it. Then he got up himself with as little noise as he could, and beckoning Mrs. Nor-

ham to come with him to a little distance, "She has had more to try her — far more than you think. You and I have been so busy with sufferings which are far off that we have both of us been blind to sufferings which have been very near to us, and which we could not only have cured, but which," he went on, his voice growing somewhat tremulous, "we have caused."

"Mr. Bousefield," said Mrs. Norham, "I am entirely at a loss to understand you. What you may have done to ruffle Mrs. Bousefield's nerves I do not presume to guess; but I will ask you not to speak of 'we.' I think also it might have occurred to you that on this day of my great sorrow, you might have forborne to inflict on me these petty — "

But Mr. Bousefield stopped her. "Hush!" he whispered; "not so loud. Let her stay there completely quiet. She has been suffering in a way which you I hope will never know by experience."

Mrs. Norham, who thought herself a very Sinbad in the land of sorrows, and whose eyes, as she hoped, were still red with weeping, was so indignant at the suggestion that Mrs. Bousefield could suffer more deeply than herself, that, although she had been silenced for the moment by the vehemence of Mr. Bousefield's whisper, she was evidently on the point of replying to him in a tone more sonorous than his own, when he checked her effectually by putting into her hands the letter which he had just been reading himself. "There are many matters," he said, "which we shall have to discuss shortly. I have now something to think of that is more important than any of them. Meanwhile, I will ask you to peruse that letter carefully. It will give both of us sorrows, I fear, of a new kind to think about." So saying, he returned to the chair which he had just vacated; and, as though Mrs. Norham were forgotten by him, again bent over his wife.

Mrs. Norham watched this behaviour with an astonishment that was touched by pity. "In spite of his talents," she said to herself, "he was always at heart a *bourgeois*," and slowly stalking towards the house she began to read the letter. The writer was Mr. Dundas Poulton; and she found in it, as she read it, an unwelcome and wholly superfluous proof of how

superior were the agonies of altruism to those of egoistic business. The Tibbits' Motor, Mr. Poulton began by saying, was bound, beyond all doubt, to be the great success of the century. There was literally a fortune in it beyond the dreams of avarice. A rough working model of it had been already fitted to a bicycle which Mr. Tibbits had ridden yesterday for two hours on a cinder-track, to the extreme admiration of five hundred spectators. Favourable notices had appeared in fifty different newspapers. But in spite of the brilliant prospects which were thus waiting to be realised, the whole concern was in danger of being completely wrecked, unless more money should be forthcoming at a very early date. The office expenses had been naturally very great. Fittings, carpets, safes, the necessaries for the secretary's private rooms, copying presses, stationery, and so forth, would all have to be paid for in the course of the coming week, the firm which supplied them declining to give extended credit. The workshops and plant — a really wonderful bargain — had cost alone about four thousand pounds, of which half had been paid already, the balance being due in a fortnight. Another thousand would be wanted to complete the alterations in the machinery, and for these Mr. Tibbits already had given orders; "whilst Tibbits and myself," Mr. Poulton continued, "have been put ourselves to so many inevitable expenses that we have been compelled each to draw a six months' salary in advance; and the syndicate has at the bank at this moment a balance of only fifty-five pounds five. I had hoped that I might, when you received my last communication, have had a remittance from yourself and Mrs. Norham, amounting to at least fifteen hundred pounds. Two thousand will settle all the most urgent claims; and I could have met the larger part of them by paying in my own contribution, if it were not that the friend on whose behalf I became responsible for it is at this moment in America, and does not return till June. Unless you desire to see an entire enterprise collapse, I would beg that you should return to London without a moment's unnecessary delay, and that you should also represent to Mrs. Norham the extreme gravity of the situation."

Here, indeed, was an unexpected blow. With heroic and tragical self-control, Mrs. Norham, for the time being, resolutely thrust from her mind all that was most dear and sacred to her, and condescended to brood over pounds, shillings, and pence. She indulged in the reflection which was, perhaps, not unnatural, that Mr. Poulton and Mr. Tibbits — the one the secretary, the other the Boanerges, of altruism — might have forborne, at so critical a moment, from helping themselves to their own salaries. She did, however, but partially realise how urgent their expenses were, and that men in positions such as theirs, with a great future before them, are apt to require exceptional relaxations, in order to relieve the tension of their mental and nervous systems. Mr. Tibbits, for example, the intrepid opponent of capitalism, had been so profoundly moved by the sight of the Motor workshops, of which he, the representative of labour, was to be one of the chief masters, that he had been driven to celebrate the approach of the social millennium by taking what he called "a gurl" with him to the Metropole Hotel at Brighton, and giving her a taste of the luxuries that would soon be common to all; whilst Mr. Poulton had been endeavouring to establish the credit of the Motor Syndicate by showing to the city friends with whom he had had dealings the hospitable elegance with which its secretary could entertain them in his own rooms. Mrs. Norham, however, though she was acquainted with all that is greatest in human nature, was less familiar with its minor characteristics, which are not, perhaps, less important. Hence she allowed herself to think of Mr. Tibbits and Mr. Poulton with an acerbity which they themselves would have resented as undeserved. This trifling circumstance gave an added gloom to her thoughts, which was still further enhanced by a consciousness that she was too much of a genius to be altogether a good woman of business. Accordingly, when she looked from the library, to which she had now betaken herself, and saw Mr. Bousefield still occupied with his wife, and at last lifting her from her seat, and escorting her tenderly towards the house, her indignation renewed itself at the unworthy *bourgeois* selfism, aggravated as it was by the unfunc-

tional ethics of theism, which could allow a man, who at heart had business capacities, to forget in mere domestic sentiment matters really requiring his attention. She must see him, she felt, at once and at all costs. How should she seek him out without sacrificing her proper pride? She rang for one of the domestics, and sent by her some pencilled words to him.

"I am in the library. I have read the letter. I must talk to you about it immediately." But to this message came back the incredible answer hastily written on Mrs. Norham's own scrap of paper, "I am taking Mrs. Bousefield out for a short drive. She is still painfully ill. I will see you the moment I come in."

During his drive with his wife, Mr. Bousefield unconsciously realised that Mr. Poulton's letter had been a cloud with a silver lining. It not only prevented him from perceiving with too great clearness to how near the brink of a tragedy his respectable feet had brought him, but it gave him an engrossing subject which he could talk over with his wife, and on which — this was better still — he could ask for her prudent counsel. Mrs. Bousefield had not been born north of the Tweed for nothing. She was full of a considerable, though somewhat uninstructed, shrewdness; and she could not have found a kindlier shelter for her reviving conjugal happiness than she did in asking her husband for an account of the financial crisis, and giving advice to him as to how it might best be met. By the time, therefore, that Mr. Bousefield had come back from his drive, and found himself at last in Mrs. Norham's offended presence, he had the novel consciousness of being less her confidant than his wife's. He had also the consciousness, not perhaps less novel, of being a man who, on short notice, had decided what he meant to do. What he meant to do was to Mrs. Norham at once a shock and a relief — a relief because his decision commended itself to her egoistic prudence, a shock because he had arrived at it without consulting her. It was one which was very soon made known to the whole household, and it resulted in an immediate bustle, a dragging about of boxes, and great collecting of miscellaneous property.

This bustle was not over, although it was gradually subsiding, by the middle of the following day, when an elderly portmanteau, two dress-baskets, and a very remarkable collection of dwarf bundles held together by prim little leather straps, were taken down the tiled staircase of one of the three villas and deposited near the front door. Mrs. Bousefield, her head garnished with a bonnet in which jet beads twinkled, was looking over the banisters, and was counting the parcels on her fingers; and Mr. Bousefield, arrayed in a loose black overcoat, with a time-table in one hand and a packet of sandwiches in the other, and some bills and the top of his cheque-book peeping from his stuffed pockets, was in the act of descending, when he realised that the front door was open, and perceived the presence of Lacy, who was in the act of inquiring for his wife.

"I called," said Lacy, "hoping that I might see Mrs. Bousefield, and ask whether anything could be done for the mother of the poor wretch who has made away with himself. She told you, I daresay, that I had written to her."

"To be sure," said Mr. Bousefield, "to be sure. Mr. Lacy, we must both beg your pardon. But to tell you the truth, we have had so much to think about, quite apart from this tragic incident, that the matter — I hope you will pardon us — passed out of our minds. Mrs. Bousefield and I, in fact, are returning at once to London, leaving Mrs. Norham to look after our guests till our term is up — till the end, that is, of the month. We are called away by business — rather troublesome business; but we both shall be delighted to be at home. If you'll allow me, I'll retain your cheque, and Mrs. Bousefield shall see the woman. She's always glad, my good wife is, to do a true kindness to anybody; and when she has seen her, she shall write to you and tell you the result. I'm sorry to seem so inhospitable; but I really feel, Mr. Lacy, that all I can do this moment is to say good-bye to you, and to express a hope that — ahem — should you ever in the future find yourself — ahem — in Bloomsbury — on your way, perhaps, to the station, you will, if not otherwise engaged, look in and take pot-luck with us."

CHAPTER XXXV

When Lacy and Lady Madeleine met again that evening at dinner, Lady Dovedale was appreciably worse. But in most illnesses patients must be worse before they are better; and as Lady Dovedale's cough was her only unusual symptom, he was puzzled to account for a certain abstraction of mind, seemingly caused by anxiety, which Lady Madeleine betrayed, and which he certainly had not noticed in her when he parted with her earlier in the day. As the evening wore on, however, he began to suspect, as a possibility, that her anxiety had its source in her sympathy with his own position; for as they sat together in the drawing-room, she showed a persistent tendency, embarrassed by shyness though it was, to ask him questions about himself. Had he heard from Messrs. Fox again? Had he heard again from Mr. Millikin? How did he learn to bear with such seeming indifference suspense with regard to a matter concerning himself so nearly? He was not as a rule patient of intrusion with his own affairs; but Lady Madeleine's curiosity appealed to him, not as curiosity, but as interest; and he answered her, if not with openness, yet with a certain air of gratitude. Indeed, before the evening closed, he made her a short confession, which he had not till that moment made even to himself. "There is one thing in this uncertainty which does give me real pain. Since I have been here I have had many letters from home about the things I was doing on my property, and others which I had meant to do. I turned to few things with more interest than these. Piles of these letters, and notes of my intended answers to them, are lying on my desk now. Well, now — I can't even bear to look at them. That's all."

He spoke with a feeling which he struggled, but not suc-

cessfully, to conceal; and then, with a desire to show that he was not afraid of the topic, and yet to get upon ground which would offer him firmer footing, he proceeded to tell her of an idea which had that day occurred to him, and which rose out of the scene which he had witnessed on his recent visit to Mrs. Bousefield. He described Mr. Bousefield's appearance, and his air of hurry and agitation; and enlivened his account with reminiscences of his own last interview with Mrs. Norham, including the tragical incident of his inappropriate laughter. Having thus recovered his equanimity, he went on to say that he suspected that the altruists were overtaken by some financial crisis; and that if only this should happen to involve the insolvency of Startfield Hall, he would, if it were not for a financial crisis of his own, have tried to buy the building himself, and turn it to some useful purpose — driving out fine culture, and bringing in plain cooking.

They both laughed at the scheme, and they parted not too seriously; and the intimacy thus inaugurated grew through the following days, extending itself gradually to a widening range of subjects. They would walk together in the garden, where the blue mornings glittered, and the powdery gold of the mimosas was now fretting the sky. They would sit together on the long terrace, whilst the sea sighed below them, chafing the shore with its soft intermittent murmurs, or bordering some island rock with a vanishing fringe of swan's-down. Under influences such as these, Lady Madeleine ventured to recur to the subject of Miss St. Germans, which the objects around recalled to them; and seeing that in spite of his sympathetic admiration for the girl, the mention of her name neither pained nor even embarrassed him, she was led little by little to speak to him about her own life. She alluded to her husband, who had died a year after their marriage — a great invalid, and a great collector of antiquities. He had died, it appeared, in Italy, in a villa on the hills near Florence — a villa at which his widow had subsequently received her invalided father. Italy, Lacy gathered, had excited in her mind an affection which had not been happy in bestowing itself on any more human object. He saw, as she talked to

him, vistas of pearly Italian mornings, when she had wandered out, as she told him, alone amongst the dewy freshness, "which," she said, "despite all that my life was, made me always feel as if I were breathing undestroyed hopes." He saw the villa, with its white and blistered walls, and the cypresses standing round it, folding themselves in their dark cloaks. He saw another villa, in which she had lived also, half a day's drive from Siena — a villa lost in enormous ilex-woods, where swine-herds sang through the warm nights of midsummer, and crossed themselves at the sight of colossal pagan statues. And through all these scenes Lady Madeleine seemed to move alone, except for her father, and sometimes for her mother or a younger sister, and on one occasion — this was at Venice — for Lord Runcorn. Of her husband she said little; and only on one occasion did any mention of him escape her which breathed anything but calm regard. Some chance allusion had been made to marriages for mere money. "My husband," said Lady Madeleine, laughing, "must have had a very poor opinion of them. He determined that no one should marry me except for my own sake; for he arranged that, if I married again, I should lose nearly all my jointure."

Conversations of this kind were of daily occurrence between them; but they both had other interests and other occupations also. Whenever Lady Dovedale desired or would endure her presence, Lady Madeleine was always at her service; but several times, when she knew that her mother would not require her, she betook herself to Lady Tregothran, who was still anxious for her help; whilst as for Lacy, he was frequently at the Villa Martin, discussing the situation of affairs at Manchester with Mrs. Tilney, to whose guidance Lady Tregothran had now handed him over, and who seemed to be as well acquainted with all the salient facts as her intimate friend, who was at the head of the Central Conservative Association.

With regard to his candidature, indeed, matters had been making progress somewhat faster than he himself suspected; for one morning at the château a line from Mrs. Tilney reached him, in which she informed him that she and the officials at headquarters had by this time settled all the pre-

liminaries between them; that his candidature would be approved of by all sections of the party, and that he would shortly receive a letter from the Central Conservative office, to inform him that nothing was wanting but his own formal assent. "You will," Mrs. Tilney continued, "be probably informed also that your return to England in a few weeks' time will be desirable, and I hope you will not think this too heavy a sacrifice."

The letter reached him at breakfast. That morning he happened to be alone, Lady Dovedale's cough having been troublesome during the night, and Lady Madeleine now being with her at Lady Dovedale's own request. He was wishing for his companion in order that he might tell his news to her, when a servant entered the dining-room, who informed him that she desired to see him, and begged that till she had done so, he would kindly not leave the house. The man was still speaking when Lady Madeleine entered.

"My mother," she said, "is very unwell. Dr. Mercier ought to be here from St. Hilaire presently; but I should like to telegraph for other advice from Cannes. If we sent at once, Dr. Fairleigh could be here by one. She breathes with so much difficulty, and I think she has begun to wander."

The telegram was sent with the utmost despatch possible. Dr. Mercier arrived meanwhile; and on quitting the patient's room exhibited an expression which he reserved for the most grave occasions. He agreed to return a couple of hours later to meet Dr. Fairleigh, in case, on so short a notice, his distinguished colleague should find it possible to arrive; and Lacy and Lady Madeleine were left in that state of suspense which makes silence a burden, and ordinary conversation an impertinence. Presently she went up to her mother's room once more, and Lacy betook himself to the garden, a prey to that vague depression which is caused in a house by the sense that death may be about to enter it. With the aid of a newspaper he had managed to beguile an hour, when he was interrupted by the sight of Lady Madeleine herself approaching him. The expression of her face surprised him. It was one he had been expecting to see on it before the evening. He

was startled to see it there so soon. He knew what had happened before she had said a word to him. He knew that Lady Dovedale had passed beyond the ken of Mrs. Helbeckstein's visiting-list. Dr. Fairleigh arrived earlier than they had dared to hope; but all he could do, in acknowledgment of his fee of thirty louis, was to eat an excellent luncheon, and pronounce, after consultation with Dr. Mercier, that death had evidently been due to pulmonary complications. "Of these," he said, "the cause was probably some recent chill;" nor, when he heard of Mrs. Helbeckstein's great but mistaken kindness in removing Lady Dovedale to a house where she would not be disturbed by dinner-parties, did he see any reason for reconsidering his opinion.

"I have," said Lady Madeleine to Lacy, later on in the afternoon, "telegraphed to my brother, asking whether my mother should be buried at home or here. He and his wife are with my father. My father will know nothing of this. His faculties are completely gone. I shall probably get an answer this evening. And I want to tell you another thing. I have just had a note from Mrs. Tilney. That woman is kindness itself. She has offered to come over and stay with me till all this is over, supposing, of course, that you should be willing to receive her."

This last suggestion was to Lacy specially welcome, as he already had been asking himself whether Lady Dovedale's remains were a chaperon sufficient for even a widow, when she was so young and so attractive as Lady Madeleine. Mrs. Tilney accordingly made her appearance by dinner-time; and her presence filled the château with precisely the right combination of gloom, animation, and sympathy, which at once pays a tribute to the seriousness of bereavement, and mitigates it. On the present occasion, indeed, she was in better condition than usual for playing this difficult part, being full of political news of a grave and confidential kind, in which interest might be decently shown, even under the shadow of recent loss.

Lady Madeleine's telegram to her brother — or rather her half-brother, Lord Darley — had its answer in the course of the evening. This gentleman, by the fact of his being only

Lady Dovedale's stepson, was justified in an opinion, which he would have probably entertained in any case, that few forms of unnecessary expenditure have so little justification as unnecessary expenditure on the dead. He accordingly would not hear of the body being brought to England, and without hesitation named Cannes as the most suitable place of interment. He at the same time engaged to be present at the funeral himself; nor was there the slightest doubt that he meant to fulfil his engagement, as he hoped to unite with his duty a little melancholy pleasure.

Cannes, therefore, was to have the honour of receiving all of Lady Dovedale that was mortal. Mrs. Helbeckstein ordered a magnificent funeral wreath for the occasion; and as Lord Runcorn put the saloon-carriage of M. Martin at the disposal of the intending mourners, Mrs. Helbeckstein went herself, with various fashionable companions in grief, to pay one last attention to her dear and intimate friend. She was gratified by perceiving that no wreath was comparable to her own; but so many of these tributes of affection were deposited on the coffin by ladies who, during her lifetime, had snubbed Lady Dovedale's pretensions, that if her liberated soul was permitted to be present at her own obsequies, she must have been pleasantly disappointed in finding that the other world was in some respects superior to this. Lord Darley was asked by Lacy to sleep at the Château des Fleurs; but having a delicate unwillingness to obtrude himself on the hospitalities of a stranger, he preferred to put up with what Monte Carlo could do for him at the Hotel Metropole.

Life at the Château des Fleurs, as is usual in such cases, grew perceptibly brighter as soon as the funeral was over. The party at the Villa Martin, and also Lady Tregothran, paid frequent visits there, but all other callers were denied; and Mrs. Helbeckstein's opinion of Lacy and his immediate friend rose in proportion as she perceived how little they desired her company. As for Lady Madeleine, though her mother had never loved her, she had always treated her with respect, consideration, and forbearance, and felt for her loss a grief which, though not overwhelming, was sincere, and said

more for her own nature than it did for her mother's deserts. This being the case, Lacy was a little perplexed by an impression, which after the funeral was very frequently forced on him, that Lady Madeleine, when she seemed gravest, was preoccupied by some trouble or interest with which the decease of Lady Dovedale had very little to do; and he could not help connecting this mysterious fact with Lady Tregothran, who, whenever she came to the château, would retire with Lady Madeleine to some room where they could talk alone.

The days, however, had gone on without anything further having come for Lacy from Messrs. C. & J. W. Fox, excepting an acknowledgment of his answer, and an intimation that they would write again. Mr. Millikin, it appeared, had been left in precisely the same situation; and a letter of his to Lacy indicated that he was more alarmed by the quiescence of his unknown enemies than he had been by their preliminary attack. But at length their silence was broken, at least so far as Lacy was concerned; and another communication from the Messrs. Fox reached him. This time it bore the address of their regular place of business.

"Sir," — so the letter ran, — "Since last informally writing to you, we have been commissioned by our client to convey to you, without prejudice, an intimation which you may deem important. He is, we take leave to mention, whatever may be the issue of his claim, desirous of treating you with every possible consideration. He not only entertains an admiration for you as a public man, but he has some knowledge of your character as a philanthropist and a liberal landlord; and he desires us to inform you that his claim will not, in any case, be brought forward before the autumn of the present year. Such being the case, he desires to inform you also, that any work of a charitable or philanthropic nature which you have already inaugurated, or may see fit to inaugurate, will be, should the case be decided in his favour, carried on by himself in accordance with your wishes. We regret that we are unable to write to you in more explicit terms. Our client forbids us to do so for reasons of a personal, rather than a

legal, character; but should you care to convince yourself that he has a strong *primâ facie* case, and that the intimation now conveyed to you is intended and should be accepted seriously, he is willing that we should, in strict confidence, disclose his name and the entire basis of his claim to one of the members of the firm of lawyers employed by you, in order that he may satisfy you that we have represented his position rightly."

This letter at once made Lacy think of his veiled clairvoyante. It increased his bewilderment, but it certainly raised his spirits. He confided its contents to Lady Madeleine, and then despatched it to his lawyers, asking the senior partner to consult with Messrs. Fox, as suggested by them. The senior partner's answer came by return of post. He informed Lacy that the case, which was a very peculiar one, was beyond all doubt such as the Messrs. Fox had represented it, adding that the circumstances were very peculiar also under which it had come into the Messrs. Fox's hands. "In the present instance," the writer continued, "you may be assured that they are acting with perfect *bona fides*, and they have deposited with me their client's own letter, in which he assures you that any work of a charitable or philanthropic nature inaugurated by yourself will be continued by him, should the property change hands. It is his evident wish that you should not be deterred from any present expenditure by a fear either that you might not be able to continue it, or be held responsible for such expenditure to him; and I will, on my own responsibility, advise you to act accordingly."

This letter Lacy showed to Lady Madeleine, who, remembering what had been said to her some days ago, suggested to him that there was one of his schemes which, at all events, it might be in his power to realise — namely, the purchase of Startfield Hall. "I'm surprised," she said, "at your hesitation. Write to some one in London, and discover how matters stand. I'm amused at finding myself, who am nothing if not unpractical, urging activity on a practical man like you."

"That," he replied, with a laugh, "would be going a little

too far. What I said to you was only an idea of mine. Still," he continued, as if a new thought had struck him, "I might find out something about it by writing to Mrs. Bousefield."

This Lady Madeleine strongly urged him to do; but an incident occurred which prevented him from following her advice — namely, the arrival of the following letter from Mrs. Bousefield herself: —

"Dear Mr. Lacy, — I am just writing to tell you that I have seen that poor body, the mother of the young man that died. Let us think gently of his act, and not presume to judge him for it. Indeed, it makes me think of him more kindly than I did. If it were not for the Lord's mercies, what might not become of any one of us? Well, as I was to tell you, I saw the poor old woman. She's a decent body enough; and as for working, she gets the napery up better than any of these steam laundries. But she's frail now; and Mr. Bousefield and I will be glad to add each of us ten pounds to your ten, and let her have it, if you approve, according to her real necessities.

"And now, if you will allow me to do so, I must congratulate you on your prudent refusal to have anything to do with that invention of Mr. Tibbits. It was indeed a bad business from the beginning; and Mr. Poulton and he have, like two babies, or worse, just been playing at ducks and drakes with the money. The hard part of it is that Mr. Bousefield will be liable for the whole deficiency, unless Mrs. Norham should be able to contribute anything; and he will probably have to sacrifice a sum which he had set aside to meet the debt that will be upon Startfield Hall, the subscriptions having fallen short of what he had been led to anticipate. To my mind, however, it would be no bad job if the place were sold, considering the management under which it must else fall. If it were mine, I would do what you yourself suggested, and make a cookery-school of it, and a school of washing and scrubbing, and decent living generally. You must forgive me, if you please, for having troubled you with so long a letter, and believe me to remain, yours truly,

"Elizabeth Prouse Bousefield."

This letter he showed to Lady Madeleine also; but before making any comment on it, she said to him, with a certain abruptness, "This mysterious claimant of yours — has it never struck you how curious it is that he knows such a number of private things about you? What should you say? — but I must tell you I've no shadow of proof — the whole thing is a mere idea that has lately flitted across my mind — what should you say if the claimant should be the father of Miss St. Germans' mother — an old man who knows Mrs. St. Germans well, and who would have had from her the latest possible news of you? Whatever he's got, he means to leave to his granddaughter; and he might, if there is anything in this claim, bring it forward for her sake."

Lacy started, and looked at her incredulously. And yet, though the question had the air of being asked in banter, he could not help fancying there was a certain note in her voice which betrayed more knowledge of the matter than she admitted she possessed, or than she wished him to suspect her of possessing.

"If my money is to be lost to me," he answered, "I do not think there is any one to whom I would lose it sooner than to the young lady you mention, and to a very promising young man who, I should hope, would share it with her."

"If you feel like that," said Lady Madeleine, "I must say you are very generous. And now," she went on, hurriedly changing the subject, "since we're talking of your generosity, let us talk about Startfield Hall. Here is everything happening exactly as you yourself wished. You should find out all about it the moment you return to London; for duty will be calling you back in a very short time now."

"Are you, then," he asked, "in so great a hurry to get rid of me?"

"I want you to do," she answered, "what is best for your own future. It is not for my own sake that I am anxious for you to go — or it is," she added — "it is, at all events, not for my own pleasure."

CHAPTER XXXVI

The ordinary cynicism, which, somewhat stale with repetition, but is supposed by many people to be the quintessence of knowledge of the world, has found no better subject for its wit than the condition of holy matrimony, which it always contrasts by implication with these other tender relationships not hampered by bonds and not vulgarised by insipid respectability. Lacy, who knew as much of the world as the wittiest cynic in Europe, and who had tested relationships of this latter kind by experience, had arrived at a complete and sincere cynicism of his own. The object of his contempt, however, was not the condition of matrimony, but any serious attachment between the sexes which attempted to exist outside it. He knew, moreover, that such attachments, though it might be difficult to prevent their existence, remain sufficiently manageable so long as they are under lock and key; and he began now daily to have stronger reasons for congratulating himself on the fact that his departure from the Château des Fleurs was approaching. When he left for England, Mrs. Tilney was to return to the Villa Martin, and Lady Madeleine was to stay for a week or two at St. Hilaire with Lady Tregothran.

The eve of his departure came. In another twenty-four hours he and his guests would be separated, and the Château des Fleurs tenantless; and late in the afternoon he walked to the Villa Martin in order to say good-bye to his aunt and uncle. But he was not alone in his preparations. Another and more eminent personage was also at the same time taking a last look at the neighbourhood.

This personage was Mrs. Norham, who had on the day previous despatched the paying-guests in a through carriage to Calais, hoping that the gentlemen of the party, who were

advocates of an international Socialism, would be able to disguise, on the journey, their extreme antipathy to foreigners. Mrs. Norham remained to go over the inventory; and the Hegira of the prophetess was to take place on the morrow. Since the departure of the Bousefields her mind had been not inactive. She had suffered, and "Oh, how greatly!" as she not infrequently said to herself; but she recognised that her sufferings were those attendant on mental growth. She was rising through them, and, in spite of them, to a higher plane of knowledge. Lady Cornelia Leyton had one day left a card on her. On the card was written, "With kind inquiries"; and Mrs. Norham, unaware that amongst those kind inquiries there had not been any inquiry as to whether Mrs. Norham were at home, regretted with much sincerity the fact that she had been out walking. These kind inquiries, indeed, touched her very deeply; and as she thought of Lady Cornelia, of her warm sympathy, of her suavity, of her breadth of view, and of the practical influence she might have, from the fact of being her brother's sister, Mrs. Norham was conscious that a subtle change was being accelerated, which had begun at the moment when Mr. Prouse Bousefield, forgetful of his high calling as her moral and intellectual henchman, had unaccountably surrendered himself to the claims and domestic selfisms of his wife. "Yes," she said to herself, "he's a sensible business man. As the editor of a Review he is probably better than most. But, after all, it appears to me gravely doubtful whether my own work in the world will not be better accomplished by attempting to functionalise the best elements in the upper classes, rather than by allying myself too exclusively with those who, owing to the very fact of their being functional to some extent already, are content to run in grooves. It may, perhaps, be that true altruistic equality is to be realised by the aid of those who would seem to be most opposed to it. If only I could manage them — if I could only get them to understand me! For instance," Mrs. Norham went on to say to her soul, "some of them have great houses, with rooms made for meetings. They lend them for such purposes. They secure on proper occasions the presence of

Royal personages. What sounding-boards for the new gospel would assemblages such as these be! One would have, no doubt, to get over some of one's nearest prejudices, but in the cause of altruistic equality one must be prepared to sacrifice what is nearest to one."

"In such access of mind, in such high hour," Mr. Bousefield and Bloomsbury, even Startfield Hall itself, began to wear for Mrs. Norham a distant and tarnished aspect; and were only brought back again into the foreground of her serious interests, by practical considerations which at intervals would necessarily reassert themselves. Mrs. Bousefield's letter to Lacy had contained no more than the truth in its reference to the Tibbits' Motor and the debt on Startfield Hall. Mrs. Norham, whose instincts as to money matters were of a very honourable kind, was anxious to meet her liabilities, but without any needless inconvenience; and her hopes of extricating herself from her embarrassment on tolerably easy terms lay entirely in Mr. Bousefield's prudence and fraternal zeal for her interests. It would be wrong, therefore, she felt, to do anything that might possibly alienate him; and this view was commended to her on yet higher grounds, by the reflection that the cause of altruism might be very appreciably injured should Mr. Bousefield see fit to close his Review to her lucubrations. Whilst thoughts like these were occupying Mrs. Norham's mind, the great impersonal Power, which makes for human progress, had ordained — if a word may be used so full of anthropomorphic suggestion — that a Bloomsbury house-agent should write Mrs. Norham a letter asking if she would be disposed to part with the lease of her present house, for which he could secure her an offer of three hundred pounds more than she had paid for it. Had Mrs. Norham been a theist she would, when she received this letter, have offered up to Providence an ecstatic and heartfelt thanksgiving; but as the only power which she recognised was far too superior to be personal, and was consequently unapproachable by such trivialities as prayer and praise, she had to content herself with feeling very much relieved. Three hundred pounds would do something to liquidate her impending liabilities;

and the link would be cut which bound her to the West Central District. Her mind, as she thus reflected, acquired fresh elasticity, and a new plan occurred to her by which her financial difficulties might be yet further ameliorated, and her literary influence placed beyond reach of Mr. Bousefield's captiousness. If Mr. Bousefield would on her account pay five hundred pounds now, she would repay him by writing for his Review an article every month for a year; and as each article, she estimated, would be worth fifty pounds at least, her loan would be repaid him with twenty per cent. interest, and would not thus place her under any degrading obligation to him. Mr. Bousefield, though he regarded Mrs. Norham's altruistic essays as spiritually beyond price, had not found that their value, estimated in mere money, quite as great as their authoress herself fancied it. He nevertheless at once accepted Mrs. Norham's proposal, feeling, to say the truth, all the more anxious to help her, on account of a certain coolness which seemed to have crept between them. Mrs. Norham, therefore, on the eve of her return to England, was, for various reasons, not so unhappy as she might have been: and a gleam of the most hopeful sunlight cheered her on her last day. Mrs. Norham the day before had, after some hesitation, written a note to Lady Cornelia, filial, plaintive, caressing, and very grateful, to ask her if, before departing, she might come and see her just once more; and an answer had now come to tell her that on this last afternoon Lady Cornelia would be at home, and pleased to see her at tea-time.

Mrs. Norham arrived, and when she entered the drawing-room her solemn heart swelled with a mixture of pleasure and apprehension; for she found herself confronted, not by Lady Cornelia only, but by Lord Runcorn, by Mrs. Mordaunt, by Miss Tilney, and by Lady Tregothran also. She was conscious as she entered that her advent had produced an awkward hush: but when Lady Cornelia rose, held out both her hands to her, called her "Dear Mrs. Norham" with the most ornamental emphasis, and said, pointing to the tea-table, "Sit yourself down here," Mrs. Norham began to feel that she had done the right thing in coming. The feeling was enhanced when Lord

Runcorn, who a moment before had been discussing with Lady Tregothran the details of a current divorce case, said to her, "Mrs. Norham, I know you are an Italian scholar. I have been longing to consult you about the meaning of a passage in the *Vita Nuova*." Still Mrs. Norham felt that, in spite of all these attentions, the situation had a certain flatness; and presently something happened which threatened to render it even less satisfactory. This was the entrance of Lacy, who, like Mrs. Norham herself, had come for the purpose of paying his parting call. Mrs. Norham had never forgotten her last unfortunate scene with him; and his offences were aggravated by the fact that this most inopportune appearance of his had the effect, for the moment, of throwing her completely into the background.

From this mortifying situation, however, she was rescued in an unexpected way. One of the ladies present, seeing her thus neglected, rose from her own seat, took one by Mrs. Norham's side, and began to talk to her with so much intelligent interest that Mrs. Norham's visit was presently exceeding her expectations as much as a moment ago it had threatened to fall below them. The person who had worked this change in her was none other than Lady Tregothran. Lady Tregothran, though no woman in London was a greater proficient in the art of snubbing than she, confined her employment of it to the world to which she herself belonged; and was quite above the vulgarity of neglecting any man or woman who was thrown into her company as a stranger from some different social region. To such persons her manner was instinctively charming and gracious. Her political interests in London brought her into contact with many of them; and her quick and strong understanding enabled her to talk to each with real comprehension of the movements with which he or she was associated. Accordingly, Mrs. Norham found, to her surprise and her unspeakable delight, that this woman, whose face, whose trains, whose tiaras, had roused her antipathy in the windows of so many photographers' shops, was intimately acquainted with her great novel, *The Disinherited* — not only with the story of it, but with the whole social teaching, and actually appeared

to be much touched and impressed by it. "Ah," thought Mrs. Norham, "what a field for my influence!" And then Lady Tregothran, when she got up to go, said to the prophetess these delightful words, "Mrs. Norham, when you are in London, I hope you will come and see me."

Mrs. Norham was still dizzy with a sense of this brilliant triumph, when a further tribute to her greatness was — she realised — being laid at her feet. Lady Cornelia was saying to her, "Mrs. Norham, as you are quite alone, and as this is your last night, I wonder if you would — there will be no one here but ourselves — stay and dine with us. Pray do not think of dressing; and after dinner we will send you back in the brougham."

With as much hesitation as was dignified, and no more, Mrs. Norham accepted the invitation; though it must be admitted her exultation was a little damped by Lady Cornelia's saying, "That's right. I'm glad of that. My nephew, Tristram Lacy, is going to do the same." But the sting of this intelligence was presently quite forgotten when Lord Runcorn said, "I'm glad to think that we shall once again meet quietly, and shall be able to talk of things that really are worth talking about."

Nor did this forecast deceive her; and although its fulfilment was accompanied by sensations of unexpected pain, these were ultimately lost in pleasure, and actually helped to ennoble it.

Lord Runcorn's conversation was at first entirely literary; and Mrs. Norham was honestly amazed at the wide extent of his reading, his extraordinary memory, and the minute delicacy of his criticisms. There were moments even when, in listening to him, she would have felt herself ignorant by comparison, if it had not been for the grave deference with which, in every sentence, he seemed to be appealing to her own taste and judgment. Thus the time passed by agreeably to all present. Mrs. Mordaunt even was a delighted listener, as Lord Runcorn was the chief speaker, and as her jealousy had been long since quieted by the size of Mrs. Norham's waist. Mrs. Norham, however, though she felt herself the undoubted

queen of the evening, became gradually conscious that a something was wanting to her complete beatitude. It was all very well for her, as a woman of unique accomplishments, to be giving her opinion of the works of other people; but her great mission, after all, was to express her own personality — partly as an authoress, but principally as the hierophant of a great movement. She accordingly began attempting, with all the skill at her command, to turn the conversation from literature to life and civilisation generally; and at last by an adroit, though perhaps rather brusque, manœuvre, she brought into the high-road of their discussion, as it were out of a side lane, the great new forces by which literature, so she said, was being affected — democracy, socialism, the denial of Theistic religion, the dawn of the love for others, "in fact," she said, "lateral religionism, as I call it, taking the place of vertical."

Mrs. Norham hardly knew whether to be most pleased or mortified by the readiness with which Lord Runcorn took up the idea suggested by her. It was a tribute, no doubt, to the extreme lucidity of her exposition; but yet it somehow seemed an affront to the burning novelty of her thought.

"In the first romance I ever wrote," said Lord Runcorn — "I wrote it as a mere boy — I remember saying that religion had three dimensions."

"Indeed!" said Mrs. Norham. "And did you use such an expression? That is really interesting. But since you used it — for in the new ethical world events have been advancing with a rapidity which has no parallel in history — thoughts have come into being which no one could have attached to the words then. When these words were written by yourself, the new socialism was unborn. No one then burned with the enthusiasm of equal culture. No one thought of altruism as a triumphant substitute for Theism. The very word *altruism* was in those days unknown."

"Surely, dear Mrs. Norham," interposed Lady Cornelia, "at the time of the French Revolution these wild ideas were everywhere."

"Not," said Mrs. Norham, "as they are held now. They are now wild no longer. The peculiar factor in the new

social situation is this: that these ideas, instead of being left to the ignorant, — with whom, to say the truth, they were a mere form of selfism, — have now been taken up, developed, and promulgated by a large and growing section of the propertied and cultured classes. That surely is a strange sign of the times; and I think Lord Runcorn must have seen it reflected in literature, even if he has not had leisure to examine it at first hand in life."

"On the contrary," said Lord Runcorn, who was still as completely ignorant as he was on the day of Mrs. Norham's first visit to the villa of her claim to be anything more than an accomplished and scholarly novelist, "on the contrary," he said, "I have observed it with some interest; but you seem to attribute to it more importance than I do. The middle-class socialism, or quasi-socialism, of which you speak has really no intellectual or moral origin at all. It has the same origin as that grotesque middle-class mediævalism which was responsible some years ago for so many absurd villas, so much bad furniture, and for the monstrous dresses and *coiffures*, by which women of a certain class — who were doubtless meant by Providence to have great attractions — were to be seen disfigured at such places as the Royal Academy. I declare I have seen the wives of some artists make themselves such objects by what they called their æsthetic costumes, that I have honestly come to think their husbands' pictures, by comparison, almost as beautiful as I said they were in my after-dinner speech. Well, what do you suppose was the origin of that solemn efflorescence of folly? It originated in the fact that, alone of all classes, during the past forty years, the middle-class has increased out of all proportion to the population. It has grown, in fact, too fast to be civilised by its own traditions: and there has come into existence a multitude of well-to-do families who have had, as best they could, to manufacture some tradition for themselves. Many of them, for this purpose, had recourse to what they called æstheticism; and for precisely the same reason others have taken to socialism — socialism doing for their political opinions the same service that mediævalism did for their manners. Both will

pass. We need not take either too seriously — the suburban enthusiasm for Humanity, or the suburban enthusiasm for Botticelli. How I could wish that Mrs. Norham, who is undoubtedly our greatest living novelist — " Lord Runcorn, as he pronounced these words, saw a change in Mrs. Norham's face. A moment ago it was chilly and blank as a northern night. It was now suddenly flushed with an aurora of tumultuous pleasure. The habits of a lifetime had rendered him quite incapable of ceasing to please a woman, when the process of pleasing her had begun. Carried away therefore by the impetus of his own generous praise, Lord Runcorn continued, "I wish, I say, that Mrs. Norham, with her quite unrivalled gifts of intellect, of observation, of social description, and of satire, would help to reduce the ideas and feelings of this highly important class to some sober and really useful form. It's what only one woman in a hundred years could do: but if any woman could do it, that woman is Mrs. Norham."

"For shame!" said Lady Cornelia to her brother, when Mrs. Norham had gone. "You'll quite turn that poor little woman's head."

"Mrs. Norham," said Lord Runcorn, "is a woman of exquisite modesty. She is so deaf to her own praises that, unless you over-praised her a little, she never would imagine she was being praised at all."

However that might be, Lady Cornelia need not have been anxious with regard to the condition of Mrs. Norham's head. Lord Runcorn's praises, it is true, had had a momentous effect on it; but instead of disturbing her mind, they merely enabled her to see with a quite new clearness the extent of her own greatness, and the true manner in which it might best be used. "Yes," she said to herself, as she sat in Lord Runcorn's brougham, "the middle-classes are farther from social truth than I had fancied. The upper classes are more near to it. I need only see a little more of Lord Runcorn; and that man, about social subjects, will think just what I choose to make him. Lady Tregothran, too," Mrs. Norham continued, "is more than half mine already! If the Church of the Future

were to meet weekly in her drawing-room, such meetings would be more widely functional than those even at Startfield Hall." And then there came back to her mind a few lines she had read that morning — lines which had appealed deeply to her, though of no great literary merit. They occurred in a London paper, and were these: "Suitable for Bachelor or Lady without Encumbrances. A unique opportunity offers of securing, on low terms, the lease of a Maisonette between Oxford Street and Grosvenor Square. Three sitting-rooms, three bedrooms. Usual offices. Address to Owner, 102 North Audley Street."

"Well, my dear Tristram," Lord Runcorn had meanwhile been saying, "one reason why my praise of our fair Muse was so undiluted was that her great defect is one which I could not even hint to her. She may have known what it is to feel love; but never what it is to excite it. The consequence is," he went on, turning to Mrs. Mordaunt, "that she is in an awkward attitude with regard to human life. She has a grudge against its crowning passion."

Mrs. Mordaunt looked up at him with an interested and half-sad tenderness. "And is that," she said, "really the crowning passion of life? Do you think ambition is nothing?"

"Ambition," said Lord Runcorn, "may be a servant or supplement to love; but it is never a substitute for it. The contempt felt for Napoleon by the old *noblesse* of France was a greater defeat for him than was that of Moscow or Waterloo. All conquests are valueless without the personal conquest; and personal conquest, for a woman, means one thing before all others. Even a man feels this with his vanity, if not with his heart. The greatest conqueror, if women of the highest class despise him, will always feel that he has conquered the world in vain. You have read, I daresay, the poems of Arthur Hugh Clough. They contain, at all events, one admirable verse.

> "Ah, years may come, and years may bring
> The truth that is not bliss.
> But will they bring another thing
> To be compared with this?

What, my dear fellow," he exclaimed, as he saw his nephew rising, "and you must be going — must you? Well — good-bye — God bless you! If you're walking, you've a brilliant night."

When Lacy returned to the château, it was not yet half-past ten. He had sent a message to say that he was going to dine at the villa; and Mrs. Tilney and Lady Madeleine were still sitting in the drawing-room. Mrs. Tilney, however, presently went to bed; and he and Lady Madeleine were left together for one last interview.

"My uncle," he said, "kept me till dinner-time talking about political business. I was resolved not to follow the advice you gave me by halves: and it was perhaps some comfort to me to feel that my last dinner was one from which — from which — I could rise without regret."

"I can't allow you," she said, laughing, "to talk in this desponding way. One would think you were never going to eat a dinner again."

"There are many things," he said quietly, "which I shall never do — or, at all events, never hope — again. Look at the sea! Was anything ever so brilliant? Since we are doing last things, let us have a last look at it from the balcony."

She followed him to one of the windows, and they went out together.

"You," he began again, when they had stood for some moments in silence, "you, whatever happens to you, have a something to which you may look forward, or which even now shines for you through joy and through loss alike. I remember the hour I spent near you in the little chapel at St. Laurent. I shall never venture to go — I shall never have the opportunity of going — in the same company to such a place again. That's another of the things I have done for the last time. As for me, I shall work, I shall laugh, I shall perhaps succeed in the world; but it is a world which for me means nothing beyond its vanishing moments. The brightest of them are empty bubbles, which burst on the unmeaning stream. And yet, do you know, I have come to believe in one thing. I believe in you. But," he added, with a short laugh, "what it is I believe I really could hardly say."

Lady Madeleine was for some moments silent. She was a woman who very rarely betrayed the least agitation; but a white flower, which she wore in her black dress, and was seen by her companion to rise and fall in the moonlight, showed that her silence was not the result of apathy. At last she found her voice, though not her customary command of it.

"I am sorry," she said, "that under the surface everything seems so empty to you. You must let me preach you one little parting sermon. You need not be afraid of it. It was written, not by a clergyman, but by Goethe. Do you remember these lines in Faust? Aren't they something like this? —

"Woe! Woe!
Thou hast destroyed it,
This beautiful world,
With powerful blow.
Build it anew!
In thine own bosom build it anew!"

"Whether I ever do that or not," said Lacy, "I thank you all the same for your last advice to me. Last moments," he added, looking at her, "have their privileges. I am tempted now to abuse them; but we are both of us too wise for that."

The following day, as he was about to start for the train which was to take him back to England, he had one more opportunity of speaking a word to her alone. "There is one proverb," he said, "of which I have learnt the meaning — Beggars must not be choosers."

CHAPTER XXXVII

The brilliant weather which Lacy had left behind him on the Riviera, some two or three months before, had found its way to London; and as one day in June he travelled to Euston from Manchester, the sun once more beheld him as a member of the British Parliament. His own name greeted him on the placards at all the railway bookstalls. A leading article in the *Times* did him ample and friendly honour. But in his own face there were no signs of exhilaration. "Here," he said to himself, "is the weary round beginning again." And then his thoughts went back to the Château des Fleurs — to its shining skies, to the colours of its glittering garden, to a little chapel that stood amongst pines and myrtles, and to a woman to whom he had said at parting, "Beggars must not be choosers."

Such as his prospects were, however, he accepted them with a frank philosophy, and on certain recent incidents he reflected with considerable satisfaction. He had pushed forward the improvements on his Cheshire estates rapidly, supported by the thought that if the money expended on them should not be his, it was at all events well invested for whoever might be the legal owner; whilst as for his personal expenses, he had retrenched these as far as possible, so that his own habits might be proof against the blows of fate. A still further satisfaction was awaiting him on the way from Euston to his house. It was now about half-past one. He went from the station on foot, and gradually found his way to a certain dwelling in Bloomsbury. He rang the bell, and a little untidy butler, with a manner which showed he was expected, admitted him to a passage adorned with a pale oak table, a plaster bust, and a tray of dusty visiting-cards. From this the little butler at once admitted him to a dining-room, where, between the fire-

place and a table already laid for luncheon, two persons were seated as in happy and domestic propinquity — a lady with a grey stocking steadily growing under her knitting needles, and a gentleman on whose knee was reposing a placid and sleek black cat.

On Lacy's entrance they both rose from their seats, the lady exclaiming, "Ah, but I'm just glad to see you," and the gentleman preparing for his guest a welcome equally cordial by the words addressed to his cat, "Now then, get down, Tompkins."

"Tompkins," said Lacy, "and how may you be, my friend?"

"Ah," said Mrs. Bousefield, "so you haven't forgot his name. People say, Mr. Lacy, that cats are attached, not to people, but places: but I don't think that's so with Tompkins. When we got back from the South he was just wild with delight to see us again; and he slept all the first night in one of Mr. Prouse Bousefield's waistcoats. We've been sitting in here this forenoon," Mrs. Bousefield continued, "because the chimney is being swept in Mr. Prouse Bousefield's library. Dearie," she said to her husband, "luncheon is in — see. Mr. Lacy, will you sit there? Mr. Bousefield, will you give a blessing? Which will ye have, Mr. Lacy — mince collops or singed head?"

Then, as soon as this weighty question was settled, Mr. Bousefield began on the subject which his guest had called to discuss. "I have," he said, "Mr. Lacy, according to your request, completed in my own name the purchase of Startfield Hall for you, and my dear wife will express to you better than I can the pleasure she will have in superintending the working out of your scheme. I may mention that I have kept the transaction secret from our friend Mrs. Norham, who lives now in a quarter of the town which is to me a *terra incognita*. You will, perhaps, according to your judgment, transmit to her the news yourself."

"Dearie," interrupted Mrs. Prouse Bousefield, "I'm sure ye're feeling that draught. Don't you think, till your skull-cap is ready for you, ye'd just better put on the tea-cosy again?"

Lacy's own house, when he reached it, was dingy and dim as ever; nor did he expect to find anything there to cheer him beyond the commonplace letters that would congratulate him on his recent victory. Of such communications he found the expected number, supplemented by a dozen telegrams, and by cards for several parties. But there was besides these another letter — an unexpected one — a letter written in an evidently feigned hand, but a hand with which he was already familiar. His cheeks flushed as he saw it. He opened it, and read as follows: —

"Your Clairvoyante has to communicate to you urgent and important news, which must begin with an explanation. A friend of yours — a Mr. Brancepeth, on whom, judging from his conduct towards you, I should suppose you had conferred some favour — managed to direct the attention of a certain firm of lawyers to the family and the connections of Mr. Octavius Brandon, with a view to discovering if there were no next-of-kin. They shortly saw reason to believe that such next-of-kin existed; but as the investigations proceeded it appeared that two persons were alive, of whom it was doubtful which was the heir-at-law. One of these was a person well disposed towards yourself, and anxious that the claim, however valid, should be abandoned. It was necessary, therefore, to sift the matter to the bottom, in order that the legal position of this person might be established; for, unless the evidence to this effect were complete, the lawyers were prepared to bring the other claimant forward, whose address, at Sydney or Melbourne, had been already ascertained by them. It is only twelve hours ago that the last evidence came to hand, which completely substantiates the case of the other party; and had it not been for one unfortunate circumstance, you would probably never have heard anything more of the matter. The circumstance in question is this: The friend of yours, whose name has been already mentioned, was employed by the lawyers at one stage of the investigations; and having learnt that one of the claimants desired not to come forward, but to leave you instead in undisturbed possession of the property,

he has threatened to communicate this person's legal position to the newspapers — presumably with a view to inflicting an injury on yourself; for you would not be able, were the facts of the case known, to enjoy your present possessions on the sufferance of their legal owner. This friend of yours, however, has been bribed to keep silence for a few days longer, in order that meanwhile one or other of two solutions may be arrived at. Seeing that undoubtedly Mr. Octavius Brandon believed himself to have no blood relatives living, other than his sister and his son, and intended that the property now possessed by you should go, in the event of their death, to you and to no other person, and that the present claimant is entitled to it contrary to Mr. Brandon's wishes, it is thought that a compromise may be effected, and in equity ought to be effected, which would leave your estates in Cheshire free of all encumbrances. It seems possible, however, that there may be another way of settling the matter of a character still more satisfactory. Your Clairvoyante has thus far expressed herself as a lawyer or a précis-writer rather than as a prophetess: but she will close her letter with a prophecy, and will beg you not to disregard it. The decision between these two methods of settling your affairs will be made by you to-night; and you will find in your house, at your return, together with this letter, another communication, which will direct you to the place at which your decision is to be made."

Having finished this, he turned to his other letters, and began again to examine them — this time with more attention. But except congratulations on his success at Manchester, there was nothing but invitations to a dinner or two, and to four or five evening parties. Of these entertainments one only was to take place that evening. He looked at the card carefully, which conveyed the request that he would assist at it. Presently he went to his bedroom with a somewhat abstracted air; and half-an-hour afterwards, having freed himself of the dust of travel, went out to confront the afternoon of a London June dressed, perhaps, with a little more care than usual.

Ascot week had just drawn to an end; and Piccadilly, after

its short parenthesis of quiet, was, not indeed fuller, but gayer and more animated than before. Carriages went glancing by, with blossoms of brilliant parasols. Men of finished appearance, with shining hats and boots, moved along the sunny pavement; and Sir Reginald Flotsam, as he talked to some choice spirits, was impeding pedestrian traffic in front of the Turf Club. But no man, walking or driving, presented an appearance so brilliant as one who was watching the scene from a certain club window. His collar, his necktie, and the delicate little flower in his buttonhole were as near perfection as anything on earth can be; and the fit of his coat was disturbed by one thing only — some cards and notes, the tips of which protruded from his breast pocket. Any one who, having ever seen him before, failed to recognise him by characteristic signs like these, would at all events have known by his hair that this was Mr. Poodle Brancepeth.

The Poodle was not alone. Seated directly opposite to him, almost as well dressed, but considerably more haggard, was the gentleman whom, with endearing familiarity, he was accustomed to call George B. The face of the latter wore a somewhat ambiguous expression, as though he were doubtful whether to look on the Poodle as his closest friend, or as an enemy. "Well," he said rather sharply, "and what's the news from Sam?"

"Dear old boy," said the Poodle, "Sam's as hard as a rock. If Moses had struck him he might have got water or perspiration out of him, but Moses himself wouldn't have got money."

George B. drew his chair a little nearer to the Poodle's, and there came over his lean face a vicious shadow of determination. "Look here, Mr. Poodle," he said, "let's have none of your blarney. You and I are very good pals and all that, but I've got a bone to pick with you, and I do it before we go further."

"Dear old boy," exclaimed the Poodle, in a tone of surprised solicitude, "what have I done now? I couldn't have seen you before to-day — now could I? You've only been in London for a few days; and as for me, I've been working like a nigger in Yorkshire, looking at Parish Registers till I felt

myself turning into a vestry-man. I hope that I've said or done nothing to hurt your feelings."

"Feelings be damned," said George B., drily. "You slipped out in a letter you wrote me at Nice that you'd been a bit too free in the use you made of my name — that you'd said this precious hoax was not your plan but mine. Well, Mr. Poodle, that statement was not what gentlemen commonly call the truth. The plan was yours, and you started playing your game to get off a grudge against a man who had lent you money. I've got that down in your own writing also; and if other people happened to know that, it would not increase their appreciation of Mr. Poodle Brancepeth. However, I'll say nothing more about these matters, unless you make free with my name, or my claims on yourself, again. Now in consideration of a little accident at Monte Carlo, which resulted in your spending by mistake something like half my winnings, and in consideration also of a little information I gave you about the Brandon family, you agreed that I should go shares with you at anything and in everything which you might get out of Sam or otherwise, in connection with this business. So come, Poodle, don't let's quarrel. What will Sam plank down?"

"My dear George B.," said the Poodle, blushing and speaking hastily, "I don't know what I've done that you talk in that tone to me. I was just going to tell you the very thing you asked me; but you jump down my throat, and won't give me time to speak. The fact is, everything's upside down. The true claimant — whatever we do don't let us mention any names here — well, old boy, I told you who that was, as soon as ever I knew; so don't say that I haven't played the game with you — well, we didn't know it up to the day I wrote to you. But meanwhile what happened was this. I didn't tell you before, because at first there seemed to be nothing in it. Sam applied to somebody, whom he believed to have some necessary papers. This person goes through the papers in question, finds out the whole thing, and proves, if you please, to be a person who is the claimant's intimate friend. And now the claimant turns round upon Sam, and does not want to

go on with the case at all. Well, Sam's been squared somehow; but as for me and you — well, all I get is a cheque for two hundred pounds — here it is — you may see it, if you don't believe me — and a written engagement to pay me three hundred this day month, if the claimant's name is kept secret till then."

"What's the meaning of that?" said George B., suspiciously.

"Well," replied the Poodle, "a bit of the meaning is this — that if only T. L. knew who the claimant was, he'd be forced, for shame's sake, to give the property up. That's a bit of the meaning; but I'm hanged if I know what the rest is. But one thing I do know — that as soon as the month's expired, we'll have a little paragraph in one or two of the papers. I mean to be even with our friend T. L. yet. I never saw in my life so ungrateful a brute as he is — and after all I've done for him, too! Why, five minutes ago — you'd hardly believe it — he cut me dead in the street. Well, George B., that is the long and short of it. If you and I are mum for another thirty days, we shall have three hundred to divide fairly between us; and as for the two hundred, if you don't think you can trust me, come with me to Sam's banker to-morrow, and I'll hand you over one-half on the spot. As for the rest, if you like it, I'll give you an I.O.U."

"My dear chap," said George B., drily, "never mind about your I.O.U. I've got one or two of your bits of paper, Mr. Poodle, already — one or two letters, as I told you; and when our accounts are squared, I'll burn them or give them back to you, whichever you like best."

Though the Poodle had not made quite so good a bargain as he had hoped to do, he had yet contrived to do better for himself than his intimate friend suspected; as Mr. Davis had, in addition to the cheque, been obliging enough to give him a hundred pounds in cash. Accordingly, the moment this business was settled, he started another topic, so as to prevent the question being reopened.

"I say," he said, looking out of the window, "there they go! See — the stream is beginning!"

"What do you mean?" asked George B., looking out of the window also.

"The people," replied the Poodle, "who are going to Lady Tregothran's. Look — look! That's the old Duchess of Warbey and her daughters. Dear old girl, she was awfully kind to me when I first came to London. And there's Hugo Surtees," he exclaimed with extreme vivacity, as he gesticulated wildly to a gentleman of fashionable aspect who was driving by in a phaeton, with a large flower in his buttonhole.

The Poodle was about to say, "I'm not going till much later;" but remembering that the names of the guests would be certainly in next day's newspapers, he came to the conclusion that an answer having an element of truth in it might be better than pure fiction. Accordingly he said, "Not I. The fact is, I and that lady have quarrelled. I threw her over once, when she asked me to go to the play; and the consequence is she's never sent me a card since."

CHAPTER XXXVIII

MEANTIME the stream of carriages, the beginning of which had been remarked by the Poodle, continued to flow towards the scene of Lady Tregothran's entertainment. This was not her house, contiguous to Berkeley Square, in which she and Mrs. Tilney had discussed the secret of Lacy's character. It was another in a western suburb, about five miles from Hyde Park Corner, and itself and its surroundings were of a very different character. It was a classical villa which taste, in the reign of George II., had placed on the site of a gabled Jacobean manor-house. The manor-house was gone, but its old gardens remained, with their ruddy brick walls, their quaint pillared pavilions, and box-bordered walks and flower-beds arranged in formal patterns. Beyond the garden and all around the house were lawns and glades, shadowed by enormous elm trees; whilst from two lodges, which fronted a noisy thoroughfare, a long avenue led through reaches of quiet park, to a gravelled expanse flanked by balustrades and urns, and to two flights of steps that mounted to the great front door. Such was Hammersmith House, which, in addition to its other attractions, was haunted by a century's memories of wit, beauty, and statesmanship. The kinswoman, however, from whom Lord Tregothran had inherited it, had, during her widowhood, which lasted for thirty years, lived there in a seclusion so complete and unbroken that its former social glories had become a tradition only; and the party now being given was heralded as a gallant attempt on the part of Lady Tregothran to bring the old times back again.

But the old times, if brought back, were to be brought back with a difference; for Lady Tregothran's party was, in some respects, wholly novel. It was to be a garden-party; but it

was to be a garden-party of a kind with which London had not hitherto been familiar. In the first place, the hours of the entertainment were altogether original. They were not from the conventional 4.30 to 7. They were from 7.30 to 5 o'clock in the morning; and how the guests would be entertained during this long period was a secret which, up to the last, had been so well kept that they enjoyed on arriving all the vicissitudes of surprise.

As they passed through two halls, from the door at which they arrived to the door opening on the garden, at which their hostess received them, their eyes were caught by a notice at the entrance to one of the side rooms, announcing that dominoes would be procurable there any time after ten. This caused at once a delightful flutter of spirits, supplying everybody with an absorbing subject of conversation; so that the party was already a success almost before it could be said to have begun. Never had Lady Tregothran looked more brilliant and beautiful than she did when, shadowed by a large picturesque hat, she administered her greetings to the ceaseless procession of her friends, imparting a freshness by the magic of her eyes and manner to phrases which would otherwise have lost all their life by use. At the lower left-hand corner of the cards of invitation had been written the words, "Morning or Evening Dress." The men had, with one accord, accepted the former alternative. The ladies had arrayed themselves in a variety of bewildering toilettes, which suggested to the dazzled and undiscriminating eyes of man the lawn at Goodwood, the illuminated boxes of the opera, the concert-room at Monte Carlo, and the Battle of Flowers at Nice. The day had been very hot; but now, in the golden evening, the air, till lately oppressive, caressed and refreshed the senses.

For a quarter of an hour or so, the guests, as is usual on such occasions, hung round the place of arrival, as though afraid to disperse themselves. But gradually adventurers, in groups of twos and threes, detached themselves from the mass, setting forth on voyages of exploration; and soon the bulk of the company began to distribute itself similarly. From various

parts of the grounds the sounds of bands were audible, inviting uncertain feet to wander in their direction. Presently it was perceived that in the shadow of a line of trees were certain little shows and shooting-galleries, gaudy with paint and gilding; whilst here and there, discreetly embowered in leafage, were pavilions no less gaudy, ornamented with innumerable lamps, and bearing over their closed doors announcements in French that they were dancing-saloons, and would be open at ten o'clock. But the central wonder of the entertainment was discovered in a broad horse-chestnut avenue, the long vista of which was not visible from the house. As the company gradually found their way into this, they fancied that they had been transported to the Champs Elysées in Paris. Along this avenue had been arranged a succession of *cafés*, *cafés chantants*, and beer-gardens. Open spaces were discernible, enclosed by green hedges, and filled with chairs, and little tables with marble tops, fronting which were the stages for singers and other artists; whilst in close neighbourhood to these were other places of entertainment — buildings of two stories, having balconies before their upper windows, and lace curtains and lighted chandeliers within. Each of these establishments had emblazoned over its entrance its name, such as *Café des Princes* or *Café des Ambassadeurs*, under which were the words, *Dîners et Soupers à la Carte;* whilst two of them added to this the announcement, *Cabinets Particuliers*.

Slowly, but surely, Lady Tregothran's guests realised that here, in these cafés, they were to partake of their evening's meal — that they were to order their dinners as they pleased, make up their own parties, and subsequently to arrange for themselves their programmes for the night's dissipation. The idea, when once it was grasped, seemed to diffuse everywhere a spirit of gaiety that was French rather than English. First one party, then another, shily made its way into one of the cafés or another. Then their example was followed by the company generally. The dining-rooms seemed as if they were made out of the very substance of the French capital. The waiters were true Parisians; and many of them added to the delightful illusion by their ignorance of any language except

that of their own land, which made not a few of the guests feel that they were abroad indeed. As champagne corks popped, as dishes were ordered and presented, and finally when, coffee appearing, cigars and cigarettes came forth and sent up their silvery incense between the hats and laces of the ladies, the spirit of Paris communicated even its odour to the air.

Meanwhile without, the innumerable lamps had been lighted. There was a glimmering in the trees above. There was a glimmering amongst the chairs and the marble-topped tables below. Footlights were glowing before the little open stages; and there came a twanging and scraping as of stringed instruments being tuned. Messengers were despatched with tickets to the cloak-room in the house itself, and presently returned with cloaks, in which some of the ladies arrayed themselves. There was a sound of parties rising, and of chairs being pushed back. Here and there a group would go out on to a balcony, and look down on the movement which was now beginning below. In the garden of the *Café des Ambassadeurs* a music-hall singer from Paris, who had evoked the rapturous blushes of every city in Europe, was about to make her appearance. Soon every seat was occupied. The orchestra burst forth, and after performances by some conjurers and artists of lesser note, there advanced at last, to a sound of tumultuous clapping, a thin serpentine woman, with sombre, sparkling eyes, abnormally long black gloves, and a voice so deep in its resonance that it seemed to rise out of the bowels of the earth. Her song was greeted by a frantic storm of applause, in which those who could not understand her and were not in a position to be shocked at her, outrivalled the minority who could, and who were not to be shocked at anything.

Similar scenes were being enacted elsewhere also. The great singer indeed was to make the tour of the cafés. But besides this movement in the purely musical world, there was a sense in the air of some wider and more general stir. All the little shows and shooting-galleries, which the guests had noticed on their arrival, were now open and illuminated, and were beginning to attract patrons. Laughing groups, or discreetly

whispering couples, were now dimly discerned strolling in all directions, some seeking the illuminations, some endeavouring to escape from them. Then presently the faint volume of music which had been reaching the ears of the strollers from the precincts of the *cafés chantants*, was reinforced by strains of a different character. New lights were seen streaming across the shorn turf, and new glimmerings mounted into the greenness of the high trees. These were the signs which indicated that the dancing-saloons were open, and that the lamps which festooned their doorways and fringed their roofs were lighted. At the same time, amongst the guests, who were still habited as they had been, there began to appear mysterious forms in dominoes. The sight of these suggested to a number of others the stimulating announcement which they had seen in the hall on entering. It was found that the arrangements for supplying the ladies who wished for this with disguises had been of the most complete and ingenious kind imaginable; and any lady who was anxious to lose her identity could enter at one door and return to the gardens by another in a garment which rendered her unrecognisable by the nearest and dearest of her acquaintances. Under such circumstances the dancing-saloons vindicated their powers of seduction by being rapidly filled with adventurous crowds of pleasure-seekers, whose members felt, as they watched or took part in the revelry, that the ordinary London ball would be insipid forever afterwards.

All, or at any rate two-thirds, of the fashionable world was present, from Royalty downwards; for Lady Tregothran had judged rightly that a party such as this would be ruined by being too exclusive. She would probably, indeed, had she seen her way to doing so, have invited a few members of the *demi-monde*, to add to the mystery, and perhaps to the interest of the proceedings; but this kindness to the unfortunate was checked by its practical difficulties. She had, however, as it was, sufficient social variety; and the inclusiveness of her hospitality was such as to give pleasure to all of her guests but one. This sole exception was Mrs. Helbeckstein, who, sailing majestically past a quiet-looking family group — near rela-

tions to a celebrated Highland chieftain — felt the blood of her father, the pawnbroker, boil in her purple veins, and exclaimed, "Dese English upstarts! — how do dey manage to get here?"

Of this happy and privileged crowd Lacy formed a member. The fact that his possession of his fortune was not so secure as it might be had been kept so carefully secret by the few persons who were aware of it that the kindness and appreciation of his friends remained as great as ever; and few people amongst the crowd in the entrance-halls had been greeted with such intimate smiles and such emulous cordiality as he. It was also noticed by several vigilant ladies on their promotion, whose minds were mainly occupied with solving the nice question of whether this person or that person were really what they called "smart," that Lady Tregothran, when Lacy made his appearance, received him with a welcome more intimate than she was according to the majority of her acquaintances; and that for ten seconds she detained him in whispered conversation. The observers saw this; but there was something else which they did not see — that Lady Tregothran slipped a note into Lacy's hand as she greeted him, saying, "Some one, who will be here to-night, has asked me to give this to you."

Lacy, having received this, not without a sensation of surprise, had, as soon as possible, made his way through the crowd, and escaped to one of the walks, where he could examine the missive unobserved. It was written in a hand unknown to him, and its brief contents were as follows: —

"Our hostess, whom I have known from a child, has promised to give you this. The pavilion, in the old garden, will be occupied to-night by a fortune-teller. Be there punctually at half-past twelve. Say to the attendant at the door, 'I come here by appointment,' and then see what happens to you. It will be something which you will neither forget nor regret. Make no engagement for supper."

Having digested these instructions, and made up his mind to follow them, he went back to the crowd in that agitation of spirits which demands some excitement other than that which

has caused it. He soon found one of a singularly unexpected kind. As he returned to the neighbourhood of his fellow-creatures, the first thing that caught his eye was a female figure standing solitary on the confines of the crowd, and looking about her with an air of singular and complete detachment. He was bearing straight in the direction of this phenomenon when he checked his steps involuntarily and perceived that it was Mrs. Norham.

Mrs. Norham had, half an hour ago, been wishing that an impertinent critic who had called her, in irony, "one of our greatest women," and had presumed to add, "How little do our greatest women know of the world," could only have set eyes on her as she was driving towards Hammersmith House; and now she had arrived there, she had sought refuge by inverting this criticism, and reflecting "how little the world knows of its greatest women!" She was engaged in this spiritual exercise when her eye fell upon Lacy — the one familiar object in a universe of entire strangers. In a single sublime moment she forgave him for the wound he had inflicted on the mystical body of Humanity by his laughter at the poet's tragedy. In the name of Humanity she forgave him; and having greeted him before he could escape her, she began with inexhaustible condescension to converse with him about a succession of trifles, beginning with climate as related to open-air festivities in general, and ending with the date of the gardens — gardens, as she vainly hinted, in which she was much interested, and was particularly anxious to examine. Lacy listened as well as he could, his eyes being occupied as he did so with wondering at the fashionable garden which had developed itself in Mrs. Norham's bonnet; but as soon as civility would permit him, he detached himself from the magnetism of her presence. Mrs. Norham, who never in her life had felt more strongly the drawing, the compelling power of that altruism whose apostle she was, was burning to be organically functional — to give herself to the service of anybody besides herself — to walk with, to lecture, to impress, to dine with anybody. But finding no one on which her enthusiasm for others might be wreaked, and fearing that unless she did so

she might fall into the sin of selfism, she determined to take her departure with all the dignity she could muster. Nor in doing this was she without a companion to sustain her. In her own breast she carried the secret consciousness that the following night she was to dine with Lady Cornelia Leyton, for the purpose of meeting a party of very particular friends, and one friend — who could it be? — more particular than all, in which Mrs. Norham would find a particularly congenial spirit.

Lacy meanwhile had attached himself to friends of his own, with whom he secured a table at one of the Parisian cafés, and at half-past eight they sat down to a meal with which even Mrs. Helbeckstein would have not been able to quarrel. As soon as the dinner was over they visited the *cafés chantants* and listened to the singers, and admired the dancers and conjurers, while waiters moved through the lamplight with coffee and *fine champagne*. Then they looked in at one after another of the dancing-saloons, and finally Lacy, who was rapidly becoming *distrait*, managed to find some excuse which enabled him to detach himself from his companions.

It was as yet but a quarter of an hour past midnight; but nevertheless he hurried to the neighbourhood of his rendezvouz in order to examine the pavilion and make sure of the door. He kept on the confines of the lamplight, walking like a shadow between the flower-beds. There the pavilion was. The door he was to enter by was unmistakable. It was draped with crimson curtains, which, being half-drawn, revealed an interior lighted by a Moorish lamp, and under the lamp a girl, hung all over with sequins, keeping guard before a horse-shoe arch and a gorgeous oriental *portière*. Various adventurers were entering, whilst others waited outside; but beyond the horse-shoe arch only one at a time might pass. Some distant stable clock at last struck the half-hour; and Lacy, feeling somewhat as if he were going to his dentist, entered the pavilion, where he found the wearer of the sequins informing several gentlemen and ladies that the Sibyl was engaged at present. As Lacy approached her she began, in a mixture of French and English, to gabble this information over again to him, as if irritated at him for not having already mastered it.

With an uneasy feeling that he was possibly making a fool of himself, he said in a low tone, "I come here by appointment." The girl's face assumed a look of sudden intelligence. She quickly drew the *portière* sufficiently far aside to allow Lacy to pass, and touched a button, in response to which an electric bell rang twice. Lacy found himself in a half-lit ante-chamber pervaded by a smell of incense. A copper-coloured Indian woman, without asking his name, bowed to him, opened a door, and he, in obedience to a sign from her, passed into a room beyond. It was seemingly hung in black, as the whole of it was utter darkness, except two candles, which burned on an oak table, and a lady in white, with bare and well-shaped arms, and a face which paint and masses of artificial hair succeeded, under the present circumstances, in investing with a certain beauty. "Mr. Lacy," she said, "if you want to be told your fortune, I must refer you to another clairvoyante of higher power than mine. Go," she said, waving one of her fine arms, "to that door — there is a door there in the darkness — and pass through. It is not locked."

Murmuring his thanks for these directions, and still feeling half-ashamed of himself, he sought the door indicated, discovered it, pushed it open, and had the relief of finding himself in a room of ordinary aspect. Against the walls were some boxes full of croquet balls. A family of croquet mallets were leaning together in a corner; and on a plain wooden table in the middle was a most prosaic petroleum lamp. But in another moment he realised that there was mystery even here. Beyond the lamp was a figure, in a black domino, which rose as he entered from a seat on the far side of the table and silently held out to him a hand gloved in black. In obedience to a gesture from the unknown, he took a seat close to her. Then from the folds of her robe she took out a roll of paper, which she spread flat on the table, placing it between herself and him. He saw that it was covered with writing, divided by thick lines into paragraphs. At last his unknown companion began to address him in a whisper, from which he could form no conjecture as to her identity, or even as to her age.

"Look," she said, "at this, and attend to me whilst I explain it to you. It is a curious and interesting pedigree. Here," she continued, pointing to the first paragraph, "we have an account of a certain James Noel Smithers. He was born in 1820, and he died in 1870. He was a grocer at Hull — look, here are the dates. He married Janet, daughter of James Pocock, innkeeper of the same city. Shortly afterwards he sold his business, retired to a small villa in the neighbourhood, became a captain of volunteers, and called himself Captain Noel Smithers. He had a daughter, who was well educated, and went out as a governess. Remember her name, please — Miss Noel Smithers. We shall return to her by and by — she is a very important person; but meanwhile we will go back to her mother.

"This mother of hers — Mrs. Noel Smithers — *née* Pocock — had for father the landlord of the Strickland Arms — a commercial inn. Here are the dates of his birth, marriage, and death. But we need not trouble about him. Let us see who was Mrs. Pocock's mother — that is to say, Miss Noel Smithers's grandmother.

"Mrs. Pocock was the only legitimate child of James Sturrock — a veterinary surgeon. He died before his child was born. The veterinary surgeon's wife, it appears, was not quite as good as she might have been, for she had presented Mr. Sturrock with a son without the sanction of the Church; and the son has apparently descendants in Australia. The evidences with regard to all this are complete; but there was at first some difficulty in arriving at them. Well — Mrs. Sturrock, Mrs. Pocock's legitimate mother, and grandmother, as we have seen already, of Miss Noel Smithers, our friend, became afterwards a dressmaker in York Road, Beverley, and died at Market Weighton, in somewhat reduced circumstances. Well — now comes the final question — who was Mrs. James Sturrock? — for, in spite of her frailties, she must have had parents like the best of us. In her case, the parent that concerns us is not the mother, but the father.

"Mrs. James Sturrock's father began as an exceedingly small yeoman, and he rejoiced in the euphonious Christian

name of Zechariah. For the details of his life we must turn over the page. Look — here it is — the year of Zechariah's birth — the year of Zechariah's death. Now, Zechariah — I'm sure I wish we were all like him — was very much richer at the end of his life than at the beginning; and now, if you'll look here at something I was covering up, you'll see something that will throw a little more light on the matter. The other name of our Zechariah was neither more nor less than Brandon. He was the founder of the fortune, and the great-grandfather, of your late friend Octavius. Mrs. Sturrock was his sixth and only surviving daughter; and letters exist which show that on her marriage with the veterinary surgeon, her father, who was rising in life, altogether repudiated her. His son, and his grandson, did more. They did all they could to destroy every record which might show that so low a person had ever been in existence; and the late Mr. Octavius Brandon never so much as suspected it. Well, what we now see is this — that Mrs. Noel Smithers, wife of the Captain and ex-grocer of Hull, was the great-granddaughter of Mr. Zechariah Brandon. Let us go back to the Captain. He married Miss Pocock, of the Strickland Arms, Hull, in 1841, when he himself was just of age; and six months afterwards — those people never waste time — their union was blessed with its one and only result — the daughter who, as we saw, began life as a governess. In 1866 Mrs. Noel Smithers died; but the year before, she had inherited from her father, the publican, a snug little fortune of twelve thousand pounds. This she left to her husband, who, with the aid of it, became quite the gentleman. Dropping the name of Smithers, he styled himself Captain Noel, and recalling his daughter from her situation, determined to make her quite the lady. Her own determination in the matter had long ago anticipated her parent's; and in order to wash themselves clean of all humiliating antecedents, Captain Noel and his daughter started on a career of foreign travel. Needless to say they frequented *table d'hôtes*, and hotel *salons*, scraped acquaintances, as often as they could, with what they called 'people of title,' and boasted of these feats afterwards. The daughter was endowed with much natural *savoir faire*.

One fine day, at Grenada, she found herself sitting at dinner by a white-bearded widower of sixty, who had the helplessness of an infirm seventy. Her helpfulness, her vivacity, and her attentions so touched his heart that he married her; and she in return presented him with one child. The mother is dead; the child is still alive. This person, if he chose to assert his rights, is undoubtedly the heir of the fortunes to which you have succeeded; but, before taking any steps in this matter, he is very anxious to see you, as he thinks that a personal interview may get rid of many difficulties. Judging from what you have heard of his parentage, you would, perhaps, hardly expect to meet him at a party such as this. A friend of his has procured for him an invitation; but in order to avoid observation, he was not to arrive till late. I have helped him so far as to arrange a meeting-place, to which I have engaged to bring you; but you must first have supper with me. This has been arranged also. Genealogical research is an exhausting thing. Genealogical explanations are very nearly as exhausting."

She returned the paper to some mysterious pocket, and still continuing her low, but clear, whisper, said, "Come." He followed her through a door, facing that by which he had entered. They passed along a path amongst some laurels, and emerged on the lamp-lit festival. Glimmering forms were moving hither and thither; the warm air was alive with whispers and strains of music. Lacy's mysterious guide conducted him into the very heart of the revelry — to the great horse-chestnut avenue, with all its glittering *cafés*. These seemed now to be more busy than ever. Parties were entering fresh from the excitements of the dancing-saloons or of the concerts, or perhaps of idyllic whispers exchanged under the chaperonage of the trees. Figures in dominoes, however, were by this time so plentiful that Lacy's companion attracted no observation. She went to the door of the shining *Café des Ambassadeurs*. She mounted a staircase, amongst odours of champagne and soup, followed by Lacy. At the top a *maître d'hôtel*, with a bow and a wave of his hand, indicated a public room. She replied to him with two words. The words were

"Numéro Quatre"; at which, with a deeper bow, and an air of confidential discretion, he opened a side door, through which, by a narrow passage, Lacy's guide conducted him to a small room containing a table laid for two persons.

"We will ring for supper," said the unknown to him, "in a few minutes. You must first tell me what you think of this party."

To this unexpectedly commonplace question, Lacy knew not how to reply. As he said nothing, the unknown came closer to him, and taking him by the hand, whispered hurriedly, and almost tremulously, in his ear, "Do you think this party has been pleasanter than the carnival at the New Rotunda, and as pleasant as a party which somebody, who was at the carnival, said to somebody else might be given at Hammersmith House?"

Then with a quick laugh, and a sudden movement of her hands, the speaker disarrayed herself of the laces and the draperies which had enveloped her; and before him in all her beauty Lacy saw Lady Tregothran. Lady Tregothran's face, as seen by the world in general, seemed almost too commanding for perfect feminine beauty; but as Lacy looked at it, he saw it relax and soften. Her lips trembled, she reddened, she pressed her hands to her eyes; and sinking her forehead timidly on Lacy's shoulder, gave utterance to a sound between laughter and nervous tears. "Except," she said, "the first man and the only man I ever loved, you're the only man who has ever made me feel shy. However," she went on, after a moment, recovering herself, and laughing again with her usual easy laugh, which had always in it a trace of sarcasm, "however, we all of us have our moments of weakness; but with good women — I mean good women of business, like myself — they are only passing lapses. Listen — I must explain to you what a good woman of business I am. A friend of yours — a mischievous little brat called Brancepeth — wanted to play some trick on you by dressing up one of old Brandon's illegitimates as your cousin, and pretending that he was not dead. Mr. Sam Davis, and his brother, who is really the Messrs. Fox, got wind of this, and were led by this acci-

dent to examine old Brandon's will. Mr. Sam Davis had known Mr. Brandon well, who was himself a money-lender in a more dignified way; and Mr. Sam Davis, going over some papers in his possession, was confirmed in the suspicion that there might be in existence some blood relations of Mr. Brandon's, whose connection with him was as unsuspected by them as it had been by himself. Having learned by the will that Mr. Brandon's family documents had been all left to me, he applied to me for leave to inspect them, mentioning some of the names which occur in the paper which I showed you. Before giving him any answer, I telegraphed from St. Hilaire for the despatch-boxes which contained his legacy; and tied up in a packet, which Mr. Brandon had never examined, I found quite enough to show me that Mr. Davis was probably right. Lady Madeleine Seaton helped me. She was the only person I could trust; and she and I got at the claimant between us. I call him the claimant. I should say the legal heir; for a claimant was the very thing he wanted not to be. His hand, however, had been forced by that enterprising Mr. Brancepeth of yours, who was determined, for reasons of his own, to let the whole secret out. We have made it, however, worth his while to hold his tongue for a week or two, so that you and the legal heir should have an opportunity of meeting — an opportunity which has come sooner than we thought we had a right to count upon. Well — I've no time to tell you more. I learned that you meant to come back to London to-day; and so I engaged to bring about the meeting here. And now you must forgive me for one white lie I have told you. I asked you to come and have supper with me. What you really will have to do is to have supper with him."

Lacy looked at her, considerably taken aback. Then he laughed. "I feel," he said, "as if you had suddenly brought me to my execution. Won't you stay with me, and support me as the axe falls? I must tell you, I should feel most abominably foolish, if that feeling weren't lost in another — my extreme gratitude to you."

"Look here," she said, laughing and coming close to him, "I'll take your gratitude for granted. Don't embarrass me by

expressing it. And now, to stop your mouth, let me tell you a story, quite *à propos de bottes*, except that it is about this party, and about myself, and against myself. But first," she continued, "I must protect my character in advance. You know how careful I am of it. You must not think what you might for a moment be inclined to think. This party of mine — who do you think pays for it? Not I, though my brilliant Tregothran thinks it is. I must tell you, that I may have some one to laugh with. Two people pay for it; and these two people are Mr. Helbeckstein and Mr. Reuben Quixano. But they do it for value received, or for value to be received presently. I am going to them now — to my two Romeos. They are so much alike in some ways that I might call them my two Dromios. And what do you think is the favour — the priceless favour I am to bestow on them? There is a certain supper-party to-night, at which I must act as hostess, for the principal guests are personages of what is called the very highest distinction; and the names of those present will be prominent in all the newspapers. Well — Mr. Quixano, Mr. Helbeckstein, and Mr. Helbeckstein's wife — all the three will be blazoned amongst those elect. Mr. Helbeckstein, I've no doubt, will soon be a British Peer — indeed, in ten years' time he may be one of our oldest creations — if the police of a certain foreign country don't get hold of him first. Well — I must be off. As for you, I don't much pity you. My own belief is that you will soon marry an heiress."

"I don't think so," said Lacy, his face suddenly clouding. "There is one woman only I want to marry; and if I married her — "

"If you married her," said Lady Tregothran, interrupting him — "see I am a clairvoyante still — she would, by her husband's will, lose most of her jointure." Lady Tregothran looked at him with curiously sparkling eyes. "Good night," she said, moving suddenly to the door. "But just a word more. I've told you two white lies, not one; and I'm going to tell you the second over again now. As soon as I leave the room the rightful heir will enter it. See — I'm touching the

bell. That bell is for your supper. By the way — you needn't be afraid that the rightful heir is the waiter."

She had hardly finished speaking before a waiter had entered, and, slipping through the open door, Lady Tregothran had gone. Lacy, taken aback, and not knowing what to do, was watching the man as he brought in a silver tureen, when another door, concealed by the pattern of the paper, opened, and a figure in a domino, so like Lady Tregothran that he thought at first it was she herself come back again, appeared and stood silently at the other side of the table. The waiter came and went, bringing in plates and bottles, and was evidently preparing to remain till the guests should seat themselves, when Lacy dismissed him, and he and the stranger were alone.

The door had hardly closed when the stranger raised her hands to her throat as though preparing to remove her domino; but she seemed to be baffled by some elusive or refractory pin. "Let me help you," said Lacy. These were the first words that had been spoken by either. He had been looking hard at her, as though to see whether her outline suggested any one of his acquaintances; but they told him nothing. As he spoke she moved towards him. She walked gracefully, at all events. Then his eyes fell on her ungloved hands. There was grace in them too; they were slim, with tapering fingers. As he looked for the pin, he could hear the unknown breathing. He found it at last, he extracted it; the domino fell away, and there before him, with her shining eyes on his, and her lips slightly parted, stood Lady Madeleine Seaton. In a single moment the whole of the truth burst on him; and he thought of the Poodle, who had said that Lady Dovedale's birth was the only secret that Lady Dovedale could keep. He held out both his hands to her. She took them silently in her own. Then, without any preface, and speaking with a slight effort, "Nita," she said, "has been telling you all my maternal pedigree." He held her hands still. He drew her a little closer to him; and as he did so he saw her eyes growing dim with tears. "You have received me," she said quickly, "into your house. Do you think I would turn you out of it? Will you

play at thinking that I am the hostess, and that I ask you to stay on for always?"

"My dear," he replied, "I will stay on for always, if you are not ashamed of inviting so inveterate a fortune-hunter as myself."

"Perhaps," she said, "as we live in a material world, there is some comfort in thinking that choosers need not be beggars."

An hour later they were walking together on one of the wide lawns. Though the company was more sparse than it had been, there were many figures in sight; but he and she to all intents and purposes were wandering as much alone as if they had been on the long terrace overlooking the Mediterranean waves, or emerging into the scent of the pine trees from the incense of the Provençal chapel. In the east, towards London, there was a faint tint of primrose, and the lamps were slowly beginning to "pale their ineffectual fires."

"There are," she said, "two things which I think I should like to tell you. When we met — you remember the time — outside the St. Laurent chapel, we agreed that the last time we had seen each other was at a certain dinner-party in London. That was not quite true. For I had really seen you since then. I saw you at the New Rotunda. I came there — perhaps I ought not to have done so — to say good-bye in words to some one to whom in my mind I had long said good-bye already. Let me talk on a little. I want you to think of me not more ill than I deserve. My marriage, as you may have guessed, was not a love-match: and there was offered me — you may have guessed this too, or other kind people may have hinted at it — there was offered me once a short cut to happiness. Once — must I say twice? — I was nearly off the rails. Had I gone — well, I'm not a woman who could ever do things by halves. As it was, I contrived to fulfil my duties as a wife. I certainly did not violate them. For me, they were not great. They were the duties of a nurse and a companion. Except for these, I have been a wife only in name."

"I wish," said Lacy, after a long pause, "I could make you a confession that was a fitting return for yours. But perhaps you will help me to carry out your own advice, and build

in my own mind the destroyed world anew. Teach me to believe in myself. If one does not do that, how shall one believe in others? Look," he went on abruptly, "another day is beginning. This evening you and I are to dine at the same place."

It was by a curious irony of fate that these two persons, who thus sought satisfaction in the depths of "duplicated selfism," and assumed that the ordinary duties attached to their position would be sufficient for them, were destined to meet, at the rendezvous thus alluded to, one who was illuminated by knowledge of a higher kind — who knew that duty in its only vital sense was a discovery as recent as the telephone and the electric light, and that those only can realise the gloriousness of human existence as a whole, who ignore the particular part of it with which they are best acquainted.

Mrs. Norham, in a passion of happy and expectant self-forgetfulness, stepped from her door in North Audley Street into a very neat hired brougham, which she preferred to a four-wheeled cab, because it rendered her less conspicuous, and was deposited not many hundred yards away in Portman Square, at the door of Lady Cornelia. Who were those others to be — those others she was to meet to-night — those others whose wealth, whose rank, whose fashion, whose influence, she valued only for the use she might make of them in Man's service? Such were the thoughts that filled her as she entered the wide passage which had not been painted since Mr. Leyton's death, but the walls of which were adorned with enough beautiful pictures — most of them collected by Lady Cornelia herself — to explain the recurring embarrassments for which she was celebrated in her family circle. In a room on the ground floor, large and dimly lighted, with a chimney-piece once part of a florid Italian altar, Mrs. Norham discovered Lady Cornelia alone, dressed in black, unenlivened with any jewelry, and having on her head a species of lace mantilla. Mrs. Norham admired the dignity of the true *grande dame*, who could afford to habit herself thus for the reception of silks and diamonds.

"Dear Mrs. Norham," she exclaimed, "this is indeed nice.

It's so good of you to come to me like this, on such short notice. Sit down," she said, herself subsiding into a chair, which was a species of high-backed throne, protected by a glass screen. On one side of her was a picture by Burne Jones, on an easel; on the other a piece of old Italian embroidery, like that which Mrs. Norham had admired on the journey to St. Estéphe from Cannes. Mrs. Norham, however, took notice of neither of these objects. Her glance fell on a glass full of crimson flowers.

"Ah," she cried, "how sweet! They are like some at Hammersmith House."

"Very likely, my dear," said Lady Cornelia. "They are just our summer roses. But I want you to look now at this piece of work. You wanted some one, so I remember your telling me, who would teach your poor girls to do something of the same kind. Miriam, dear," said Lady Cornelia, slightly raising her voice. And as she spoke, from a shadowy room beyond there came forward a person of middle age, meek, demure, and grave, whom Lady Cornelia introduced by saying, "This is Miss Minden, who helps me with my own embroidery school. Indeed, she manages it entirely, and has made it what it is."

Mrs. Norham hardly knew if she were awake or dreaming. Miss Minden was just the sort of woman she might have met any day in Bloomsbury. This reflection was causing a knot in Mrs. Norham's throat, when Lady Cornelia continued, in her bland and musical accents, "She will help you to start a class at that place of yours — Startfield Hall. But no — I forgot. Your Startfield Hall has been sold."

"It has," said Mrs. Norham, suddenly pulling herself together, "had to be put on a new financial basis: but I shall always be able to secure it for any object that may interest us."

"My dear," replied Lady Cornelia, "I fear that is hardly so. It has been bought by my nephew Tristram, who is going to turn it into a cookery school. By the way — do you know? — very probably not — it's a piece of family news — my nephew is going to be married — to Lady Madeleine Seaton.

They are both coming here to-night. My brother is coming too — in fact, he's in the house now. He's staying with me, whilst something is being done to his own drains. It's very naughty of him not to be down already. However, we know what keeps him. He's upstairs talking to some one to whom you will be talking presently."

Mrs. Norham could hardly speak — such a storm of emotions swept through her. Startfield Hall in the hands of Mr. Tristram Lacy! But the mention of Lacy's name, in one way, at all events, revived her. He would see her shining amongst the other impending guests. He would see her once more swaying the mind of the Prime Minister — a mind, thought Mrs. Norham, which, this evening, would be decorated by a blue ribbon. Her spirit was thus occupied when Lacy and Lady Madeleine entered, both of them looking cooler and more placid than usual.

"My dear," said Lady Cornelia, touching Mrs. Norham's shoulder, "you and Miss Minden have your little talk together. I've several things I must say to these two surprising young people."

Mrs. Norham resigned herself to her fate, feeling, as she did so, that she was for the moment entering into the shadow of a great sorrow. She little knew what more was in store for her, and that the chalice of altruistic martyrdom was as yet only half drained. The laughter and conversation of the others was still occupying her ears, somewhat incapacitating them for the reception of Miss Minden's wisdom, when she was conscious that the door had opened. She heard Lady Cornelia utter her brother's name; she also heard a rustle of silken skirts; she also heard Lady Cornelia saying to a servant, "Dinner." Then, with a quick movement, Lady Cornelia came back to her and said, "She's come down at last. She's staying with me for a meeting. Here's your particular friend — the friend I've been saving for you — a little surprise for both. You and she will have so much to say to each other."

Mrs. Norham looked up. The feelings of Macbeth when he saw the ghost of Banquo were placidity when compared with hers when she saw the apparition before her — the

bangles, the rings, the silk, and the short fair hair. Mrs. Norham found herself in the presence of Mrs. Delia Dickson.

"Mrs. Norham," said Lady Cornelia affectionately to this portent, "I'm sure will do all she can for us. She's so interested in social matters."

At dinner there was no blue ribbon; there were no tiaras, except one which was invisible — a tiara of the selfless sufferings known only to those who, feeling themselves the life of thousands, feel that thousands are wounded when they are themselves unrecognised, or when, worse still, they are affronted by the successes of a despised rival. Even so, however, at this supreme moment, Mrs. Norham was not left without some secret comfort. Three weeks later she was to address a select meeting, the object of which was the protection of female purity — a meeting which was to take place in Mrs. Helbeckstein's gilded concert-room, and at which Mr. Helbeckstein himself had consented to take the chair.

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